

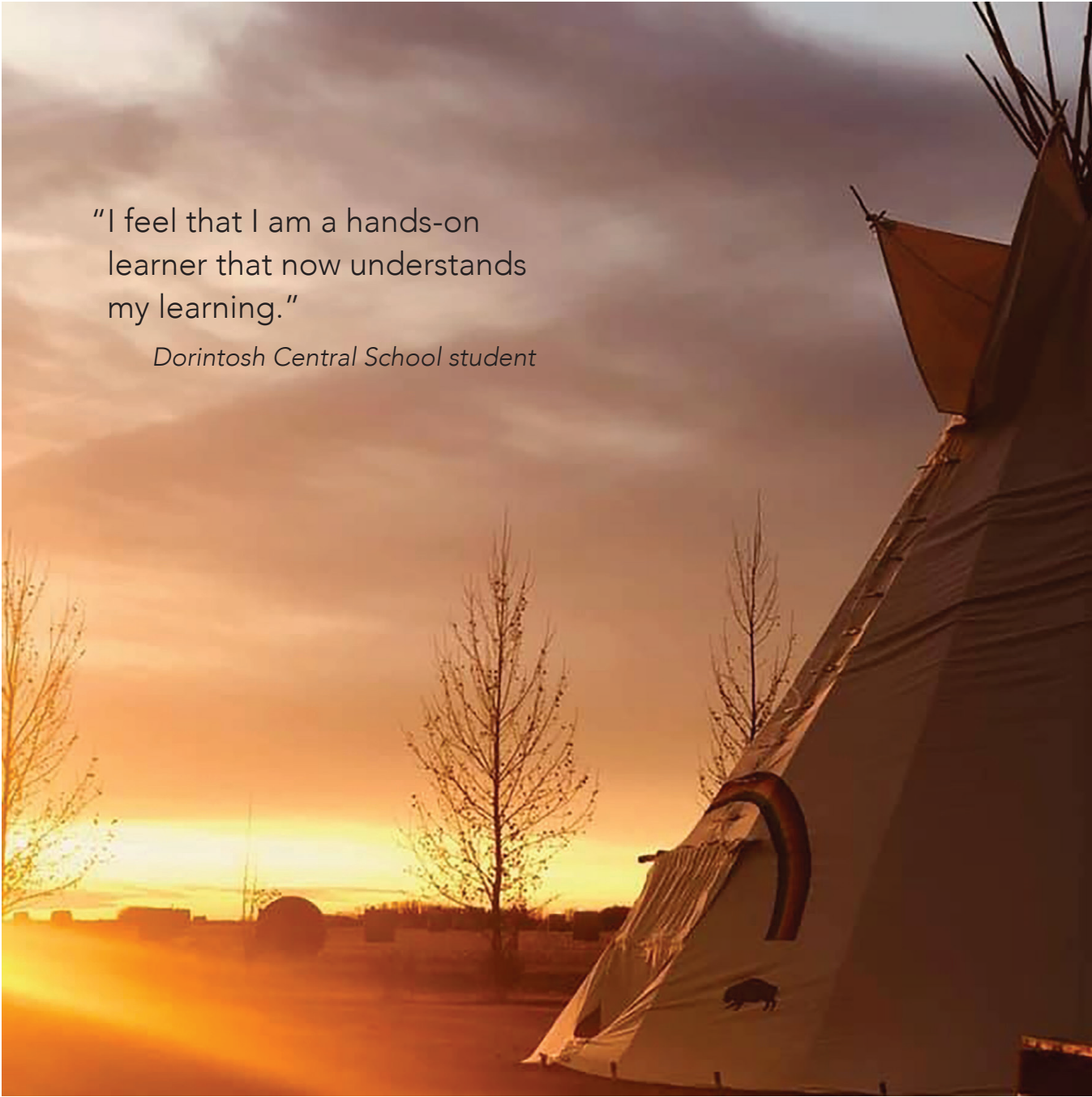
Project 298

May 2021

# Developing Sense of Belonging

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"I feel that I am a hands-on learner that now understands my learning."

*Dorintosh Central School student*

📷 Martina Irwin (Dorintosh Central School student)

**"The research tells us several things. The first is that the experience of belongingness is associated with important psychological processes. Children who experience a sense of relatedness have a stronger supply of inner resources. They perceive themselves to be more competent and autonomous and have higher levels of intrinsic motivation."**

Osterman, K. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of Educational Research*, 70 (3), 323-367.

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# Our Purpose

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We intended to focus on students' sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School. The purpose of the proposed research was motivated by the impact holistic learning has on students' sense of belonging in the learning environment. Furthermore, our research team explored students' sense of belonging through the Indigenous lens of the Circle of Courage.



# Scope

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The scope of our research included the participation of Dorintosh students (17 in total), staff (five in total), School Community Council (five in total), and Sid Fiddler (Elder).

# Objectives

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1. Develop a strong sense of belonging in our students, staff, and community.
2. Connect Indigenous and western knowledge.
3. Explore holistic learning benefits through land-based education.
4. Promote pride in culture and participation through Truth and Reconciliation.

# Our Context

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We are three researchers teaching in an elementary K-8 school in the small rural community of Dorintosh, Saskatchewan. The families of our students and Dorintosh community members were encouraged and invited to participate in our research during the 2019-2020 school year. Dorintosh Central School subscribes to the approach of inclusion for meeting the needs of all students. This requires a student-directed approach focused on student strengths, needs, and interests. To cultivate a strong sense of belonging with peers, staff, and community members, Dorintosh Central School students developed the Culturally Courageous Land-Based Leadership initiative.

# Our Process

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1. Action research framework and data will be collected using qualitative methods.
2. Incorporation of Indigenous research methods (researchers and participants will participate in research circles, conversations, and journaling).
3. Open, structured conversations to collect participants' narrative.
4. Research circles to collect data in a traditional way.
5. Journaling for researcher and participant reflection.
6. Collection of students' sense of belonging data through ceremony (tipi).
7. Collection of students' sense of belonging data through survey.

# Our Core Beliefs

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## **1. Sense of belonging is essential to student learning**

According to Osterman (2000), the need for belonging is a paramount human motivation. Maslow (1968) believed that the need to belong is essential to develop esteem and self-actualization. Additionally, Anderman (2002) associated a sense of belonging with intrinsic motivation, academic achievement, and school success. When a student feels valued, they are willing to invest time and energy in their learning (Weiner, 1990). Murray and Greenberg (2001) argued that an inability to develop a strong sense of belonging can lead to substance abuse, reduced academic achievement and school retention, and diminished social and emotional regulation. Additionally, the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education (2015) affirms that actualizing a needs-based model requires an understanding of student strengths, needs, and interests while providing the support needed to eliminate barriers. Consequently, embracing an understanding that all individuals belong and must be valued within the learning environment is essential.

## **2. Truth and Reconciliation and decolonization is imperative within Saskatchewan's learning context**

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2012), education plays a fundamental role in the process of finding truth and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada. Education calls to action pertinent to our research include K-8 curriculum and resources addressing residential schools, treaties, Indigenous historical perspective, Aboriginal history, legacy, building student understanding, empathy, respect regarding Aboriginal history, and education on spiritual beliefs, practices, and culture developed in partnership with Elders.

It is evident that when comparing Eurocentric and Aboriginal knowledge constructs, we find unique theories, philosophies, histories, ceremonies, and stories (Battiste, 2002). For example, Aboriginal learning can take on many forms such as sharing circles, observations, ceremonies, experiential education, prayer, and storytelling. "The distinctive feature of Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy are learned by observation and doing, learning through authentic experiences and individualized instruction, and learning through enjoyment" (Battiste, 2002, p.18). If colonization has cast out Indigenous communities from the land, then decolonization involves reconnecting those communities to the land, knowledge, culture, and language (Wildcat, M., McDonald, M., Irlbacher-Fox, S., Coulthard, G. (2014). Land-based education attempts to create a rebirth of Indigenous culture, spirit,



and physical connection to the land. Reconciliation becomes difficult without a connection to the land, traditional practices, and recognition that Indigenous populations are the original decedents of the land. Additionally, “Two-eyed seeing is to normalize Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum so that both Indigenous and conventional perspectives and knowledge will be available not just for Aboriginal peoples, who would be enriched by that effort, but for all people.” (Battiste, 2010, p. 17). This is fundamental to the process of reconciliation.

### **3. Holistic education is fundamental in empowering student learning**

Saskatchewan schools have begun to adopt holistic environments that embrace the psychological, physical, emotional, and cultural needs of our children. Lauricella, S. and MacAskill, S. (2015) define holistic education as the first-hand odyssey of discovery where all students and teachers learn and develop together. Holistic learning encompasses the whole learner and uses a variety of learning and teaching strategies to meet the needs of all involved. Additionally, it is not just academic and or job-related but also embraces the dynamic and multi-faceted nature of human development (Mahmoudi, Jafari, Nasrabadi, Liaghatdar, 2012). Holistic learning nurtures the physical, social, emotional, moral, artistic, creative, and spiritual characteristics of the individual.

Brendtro, L., Brokenleg, M., and Bockern, S. (1990) also acknowledge the following basic components to children developing self-esteem, significance, competence, power, and virtue. Significance refers to the ability to develop a strong sense of belonging, while competence denotes mastering your environment with success (Coopersmith, 1967). Power signifies an ability to control behaviour, while virtue symbolizes the value of culture. Moreover, Indigenous educational practices addressed all these mechanisms. The Circle of Courage framework promotes significance cultivated by belonging, competence secured with opportunities of mastery, power encouraged by independence, and virtue expressed through generosity. (Brendtro, Brokenleg, Bockern, 1990). According to Bopp, Bopp, Brown, and Lane (1989), the Medicine Wheel also embodies a non-linear ideal of human development. It is a traditional model of lifestyle, a holistic approach to living a good life, and four interdependent directions. This holistic approach to living also relies on balancing the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual characteristics of the self.

### **4. Indigenous research methods can help foster student narrative**

According to Kovach (2009), there are a range of ways to access information within Indigenous research. There are a variety of methods used to collect this information ranging from storytelling to research circles, conversations, and journaling. Open and structured conversations demonstrated a reverence for the participants’ narrative and provided the participants with greater control of what they wish to share regarding the research. Sharing circles, or more recently utilized research-sharing circles, help the researcher amass data in academic and applied research. This process is grounded in cultural tradition. Also, journaling provides an opportunity for reflection. Moreover, this can be a means of measuring and documenting knowing, a meaning-making process. Indigenous forms of knowledge will test western research methods and their ability to employ this Indigenous knowledge on their terms.



# Data Collection: Themes from Student Narratives

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During our research, we collected our data using teacher observations, student-teacher conversations, and student products from our research circles. Students identified the following themes.

## Student Sense of Belonging

- Students felt connected to staff, students, community.
- Students felt connected to learning and culture.
- Students felt connected to Elder Sid Fiddler (father-like relationships).
- Students shared their experiences and feelings about activities, meals, pictures, stories, and friends.
- Students felt happy and connected with others and their narratives.
- Students identified a sense of belonging (friendships, land, animals).
- Students participated in narrative building and support of others.
- Students felt connected to the land; an example was fire (connection, warmth, comfort).
- Students felt ownership over tipis and connected to tipi artwork.
- Students participated in shared learning (holistic: physical, mental, emotional, social).

## Truth and Reconciliation

- Students learned about protocols (smudge, ceremony, tobacco, tipi, fire).
- Students explored their connection (culture, land, elder).

- Students expressed spirituality through ceremony (thankfulness).
- Students communicated about traditional worldview (land-guiding behaviour, actions).
- Students learned the truth about residential schools and its impacts.
- Students learned about women as the carriers of culture.
- Students engaged in language and culture (importance of land through stories, traditions, ceremony).

## Curriculum Connections

### Comprehend and Respond

- Students used the land and Elders to view, listen, and read.
- Students used the land and Elders to construct meaning (b/d/a) at each learning opportunity.
- Students used the land and Elders to explore the truth about Canada's history.
- Students used the land and Elders to explore laws/legislation relating to FNMI.

### Compose and Create

- Students demonstrated shared learning about FNMI narrative.
- Students constructed meaning about treaty education and Truth and Reconciliation.
- Students shared their knowledge about tipi teachings, protocols, and construction with others.
- Students shared personal learning perspectives and narratives through research circles.

### Assess and Reflect

- Students deconstructed and reflected on their learning through journaling and artwork.
- Students expressed feelings about learning, connection, and sense of belonging.
- Students built capacity in others (shared learning).
- Students developed goal setting for future self-directed learning experiences.

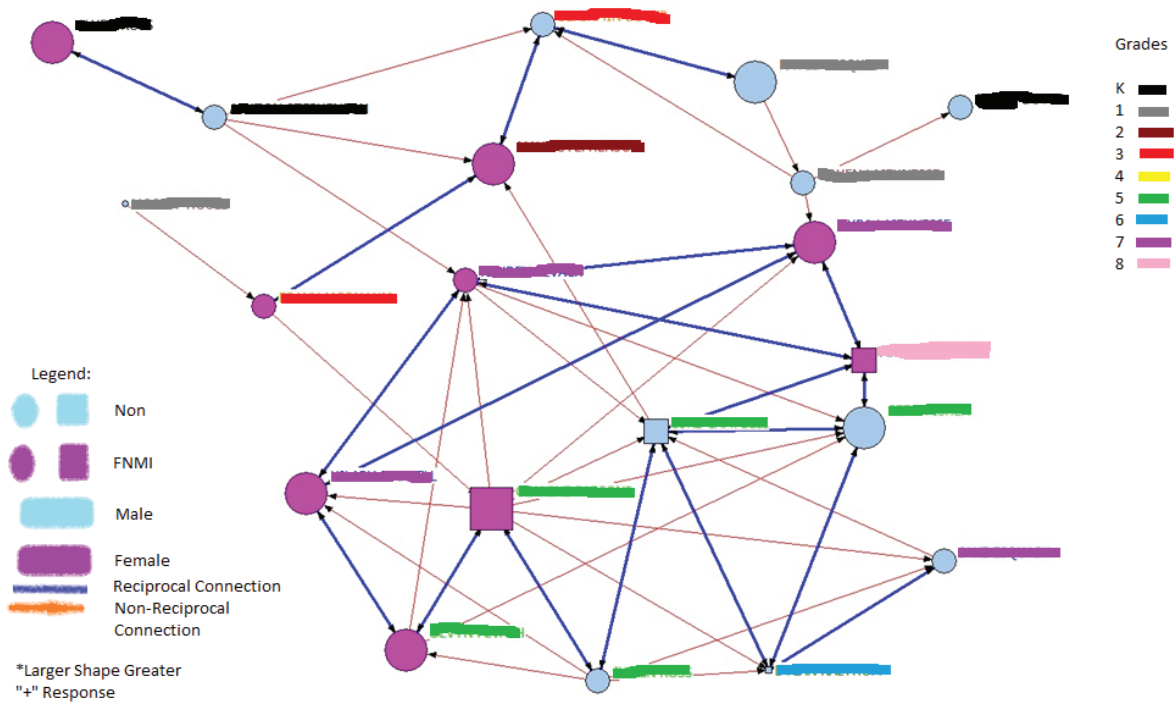
# Data Collection: Student Surveys

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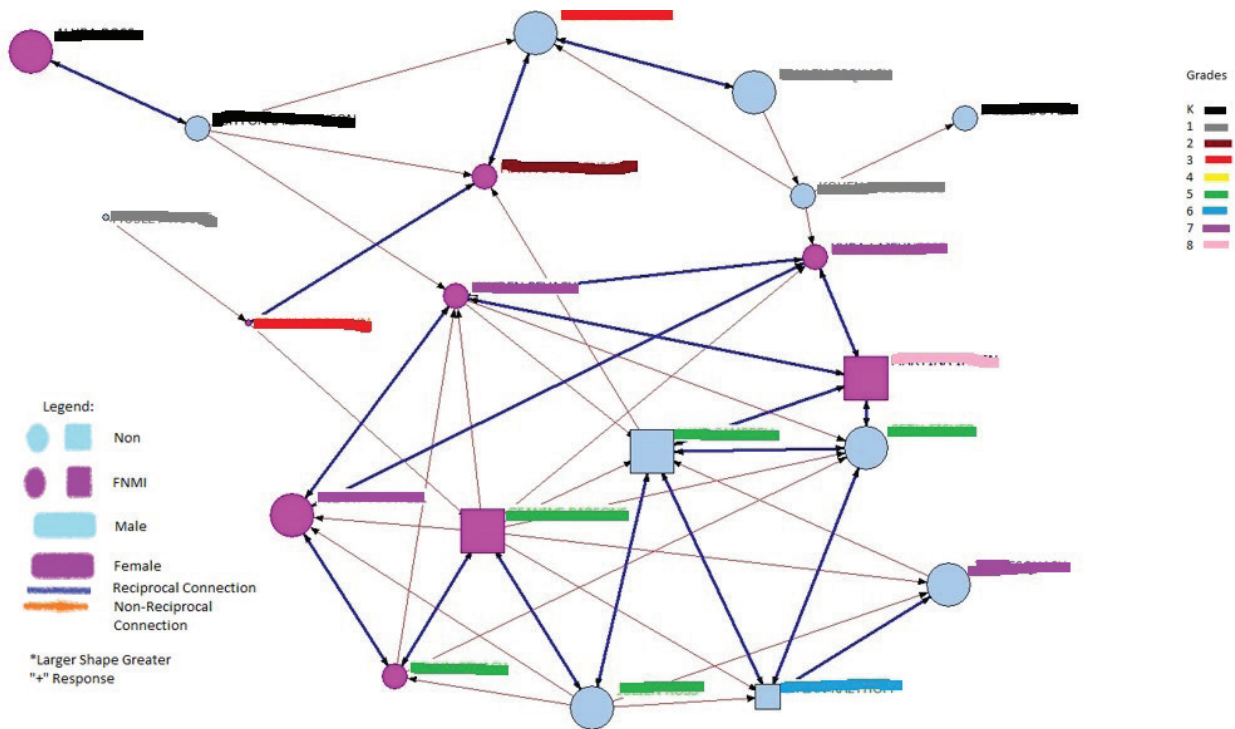
During our research, we collected our data using a mixed-method approach. After many discussions and with the aid of Northwest School Division Learning and Assessment Consultant Matthew Grupp, students completed a qualitative survey followed by a quantitative social network analysis. Grupp used our survey data analysis program called Netdraw to map out a variety of social connections within our building.

(Borgatti, S.P., 2002. *NetDraw Software for Network Visualization*. Analytic Technologies: Lexington, KY)

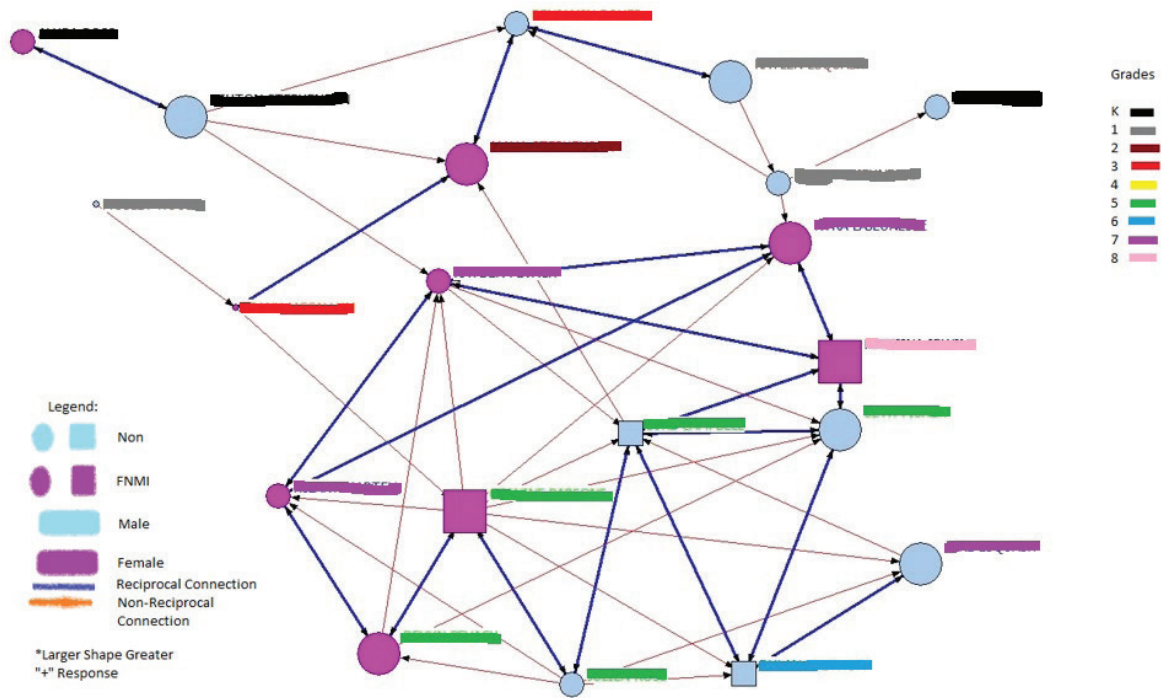
## I Feel That My Culture is Represented at My School



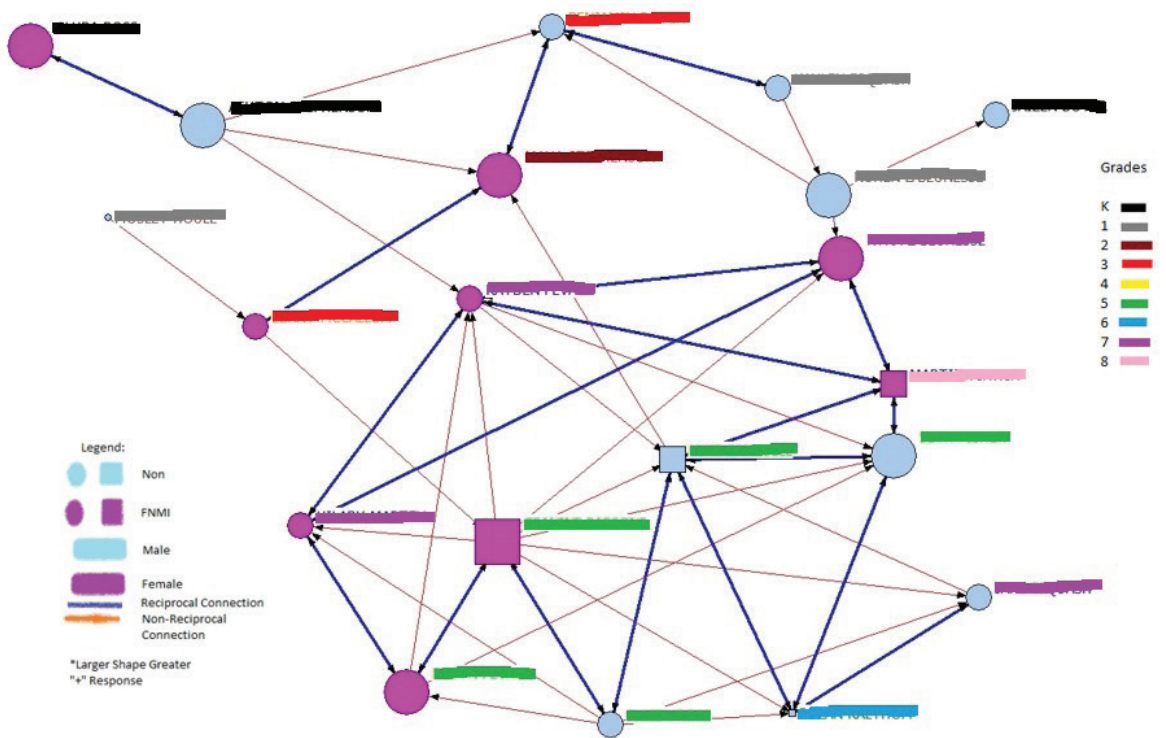
## I Feel That My Culture is Respected and Valued at My School



## I Feel That I Belong in My School



## I Feel That I Belong in My Classroom



# Data Collection: Survey Themes

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The following was observed based on the above survey results and data analysis.

- Grades 3 to 8 share in extended integrated and reciprocal social networks.
- All students in Dorintosh Central School are connected to a larger social network.
- There is no evidence of separation by sex, culture, creed, or self-declaration.
- Social networks cluster with the age of peers.
- Students reported that their culture was represented and respected.
- Students reported that they belong in class and at school.

# Project Reflections

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As a research team, we intended to focus on students' sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School. The purpose of the proposed research was motivated by the impact holistic learning has on students' sense of belonging in the learning environment. Furthermore, our research team explored students' sense of belonging through the Indigenous lens of the Circle of Courage.

Our objectives were the following:

- Develop a strong sense of belonging in our students, staff, and community.
- Connect Indigenous and western knowledge.
- Explore holistic learning benefits through land-based education.
- Promote pride in culture and participation through Truth and Reconciliation.

The following reflection prompts were offered:

- Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.
- Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.
- Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.



# Reflection Responses

## Amy Campbell (Project Member/K-4 Teacher)

**Reflection #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

- Student-centred (students always had input into what we were doing).
- Older students mentored younger students to help them build independence in their learning, giving older students a leadership role and younger students independence in their learning.
- Instruction was developed based on what students needed.
- Truth and Reconciliation experiences impacted student sense of belonging positively and increased empathy, and as a result, built community within the classroom and the school community.
- Connection to the land was greatly impacted. Students were sharing about how they connected and how they felt about being connected.
- Relationships in the building and with the community were very strong, and it was evident through interactions with many people especially our Elder, Mr. Fiddler. Lots of my students talked about him like he was their grandpa.

**Experience:** When Mr. Fiddler was sharing that he went to a residential school, one of my Grade 1s was so upset about how he was treated. She said she was so sad about how he was treated and that no one should be treated like that. We explained to her how important it was to be learning this, so this never happens to anyone again. This experience built her empathy and understanding of reconciliation.

**Reflection #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

- It was not a traditional teaching role in terms of how we truly worked together as a team within the school and with families.
- I learned what it meant to truly belong along with my students.
- I saw how students connected to who they were and where they came from and how proud they were of that. I watched a student be quiet in the classroom, but at a powwow, he lit up and came alive. After that experience, he opened up more in the classroom.
- Working with students to develop learning experiences giving them ownership of their learning.

**Reflection #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.**

- Eye-opening because it was student-led. It required me to have a growth mindset and see ideas and concepts through a different lens rather than through a traditional teacher role.
- I felt I belonged and had a strong part in the community, so this impacted how I taught, how I connected, and how I experienced teaching.
- My students' sense of belonging allowed them to be more open in different environments.

**Student comments I remember:**

I love how Dorintosh Central School is like a big family!

It's like we are family, like my classmates are more like brothers and sisters.

**Personally:**

I am so very grateful for the experience my son had at Dorintosh Central School. He is always talking about Mr. Fiddler and what he learned from him. Luke has a strong sense of who he is, how he is connected to people, and understands what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like to be part of a community because of his time at Dorintosh Central School.

This reflection makes me miss Dorintosh Central School.

Amy

**Scott Thompson (Project Member/Grades 5 and 6 Teacher)**

**Reflection Question #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

- Student-centred and student-driven.
- We met each student where they are at and tailored instruction to match their needs.
- Provided students with a variety of ways to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding.
- Students were more aware of self and others, increased empathy.
- Truth and Reconciliation were done in a deep and meaningful way; students developed strong connections with other communities and Elders.
- Students were able to develop mastery. They took what they learned and shared/taught other groups of students and adults (including other educators).
- Greater connection to and awareness of the land and their environment.
- Students took ownership of their learning and relationships which enhanced sense of belonging.

- Grade 8 student stated, "I would finish Grade 12 here if I could. I don't want to go to any other school." This was a student who struggled in a traditional learning environment but flourished in this one. He gained confidence in his abilities and liked going to school for the first time.

**Reflection Question #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

- Co-constructed learning environment and activities with the students.
- Students exhibited mastery of skills: led and taught teachers, adults, and other students what they had learned.
- Sense of belonging/ownership over their building/environment.
- Students had an active voice in choosing and developing their learning experiences.
- Developed a much stronger and meaningful relationship with staff, students, and community. It felt more like a family.

**Reflection Question #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.**

- Very student-centered and student driven. Not a traditional role as a teacher but more a facilitator in this model.
- Required adaptability and flexibility.
- Cohesive team. I felt like we could work together and tackle anything.
- Growth mindset: looked for solutions to challenges rather than allowing them to be roadblocks.
- Very enjoyable experience.
- Felt connections were much stronger and more meaningful.
- Transformational in how I viewed my role as an educator.
- I would have been very happy to finish my career doing this.

**Michael Radford (Project Member/Principal/Grades 7 and 8 Teacher)**

**Reflection Question #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

Through the research process, it became evident that self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, and holistic land-based learning had a profound impact on our students.

The process of action research provided our community with the opportunity to witness transformational change. Throughout this journey, Dorintosh students participated in a variety of learning opportunities that fostered a sense of belonging and relationship with peers, an introduction to a variety of land-based skills, independence of those skills, and an opportunity to share their learning. Furthermore, they adopted ownership over the opportunities offered and recognized the importance of local community knowledge, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers. Consequently, these opportunities nurtured student connections with their peers, teachers, and community. A perfect example of this was the relationship students developed with Elder Sid Fiddler. Sid became the father figure in our school. This relationship was also evident with our staff. This was a true indicator of how a sense of belonging can be influenced by learning opportunities rich in connection and relationship building. As we collected data through research circles, it was evident that our learning community had shifted from a traditional western education model to an inclusively robust, authentic, and empathetic culture of learning.

**Reflection Question #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

During my experience supporting a culture of belonging, I witnessed our students support each other through relationships, developing relationships with other students, staff, and community members, including Elder Sid Fiddler. Students were encouraged to promote skill literacy and independence. Every learning opportunity activated students understanding of what they already knew, what they want to know, and what they learned. Furthermore, I observed an eagerness in student engagement and consensus about their learning. This enabled students to connect their experiences with their learning and the Saskatchewan curriculum. Through self-reflection, students validated their understanding through observations, conversations, and products. Dorintosh Central School's self-directed approach builds on student strengths, needs, and interests and impacted students' sense of belonging positively.

**Reflection Question #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.**

Throughout the process of our research, we intended to measure the impact holistic learning had on students' sense of belonging in our school. This process of action research has impacted and challenged my understanding of education. We investigated the impact self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, and land-based learning had on students' sense of belonging. However, I found that this process had a profound impact on me. We became symbiotic learners, explorers on a journey of self-realization. Before this project, I always felt like I belonged to the many wonderful schools that I worked at, but somehow this was different. It was as if there was a heightened sense of belonging and relationship building. It reminded me of previous life experiences and being part of a sports team or family. Subsequently, I believe that a holistic, self-directed, land-based learning approach impacted the sense of belonging in our students, staff, and community and connected Indigenous and western knowledge and promoted empathy through Truth and Reconciliation.

## **Bobbi Greedus (Educational Assistant/Wellness Co-ordinator)**

Reflection Question #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.

- Student-centred.
- Meeting student needs matching instruction to their interests.
- More aware of self and others resulting in a formation of empathy for others.
- Developed real connections with different communities.
- A greater connection to their relationship to the land.
- Students seized ownership of their learning and relationships.

Reflection Question #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.

- Leading and teaching all participants.
- Participants developed a sense of belonging over their learning and experiences.

Reflection Question #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.

- Student-centred.
- Very flexible.
- Enjoyable experience.
- Developed strong connections.

## **Sandra Bannister (Participant/Dorintosh Central School Admin Assistant)**

Reflection Question #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.

- Student-centred and driven.
- Meeting each student where they are at and tailoring instruction to match their needs.
- More aware of self and others; increased empathy.
- Students all stepped up and took the lead whether it be with other students or adults.

**Reflection Question #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

- Enjoyed contributing as students were eager to gain knowledge of culture and be the voice of our building.

**Reflection Question #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.**

- Very enjoyable experience.
- Felt connections were stronger.
- Pride shown on the faces of staff and students and the eagerness to try new activities.

### **Cheryl Treptow (Participant/Northwest School Division Learning Coach)**

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with Dorintosh staff and students as their learning coach before and during their research process. It was intriguing to watch the excitement and passion behind the project build as time went on. This was a staff that was driven by their belief that all students deserved to learn within an inclusive learning environment grounded by a strong sense of belonging.

The efforts to develop belonging for their students extended to developing belonging for guests, such as myself, working in their school environment. Students and staff were welcoming as they proudly and confidently shared their accomplishments and learning with me.

The staff graciously extended an open invitation for me to participate in their land-based learning experiences making me feel like a valued member of their team. Through my observations during one of their land-based learning experiences, I noticed the active engagement of students, staff, and community members. The Elder respectfully shared knowledge to enrich the learning. Parents and community members were meaningfully involved by volunteering their time and resources to make the experience a possibility. Students took ownership by knowing what their learning goals were and worked hard to reach them before, during, and after the land-based learning experience. Teachers and staff members were facilitators of learning as students worked to achieve their goals. All stakeholders contributed and played an important part.

Through strong school-based leadership, Michael Radford was able to share his vision to develop belonging and to build the capacity of his team to promote pride in culture and participation through Truth and Reconciliation while also changing teaching practice through land-based learning. I am very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from this committed team of educators.

## **Terry Craig (Participant/Presenter/Northwest School Division Senior Administrator)**

**Reflection Question #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

As the superintendent working with the Dorintosh Central School, I was well-apprised of their research practices and how they endeavoured to create a better sense of belonging among students, educators, and community members through the promotion of self-directed learning, the Indigenous lens of Circle of Courage, Truth and Reconciliation and holistic land based-learning.

I had numerous opportunities to discuss and be directly involved with this project with staff and students through working with their Elders, participating in land-based learning activities, and promotions of Truth and Reconciliation. Through this process, I had lots of conversations and interactions with Elders, staff, and students, and it was abundantly evident that all parties felt as though they were part of something very special. In essence, they belonged, and when they talked about what they were doing and how they were doing it, they were able to expound on how it all fits together and where they were on their learning journeys.

All aspects of the project were completed through the lens of the Circle of Courage, which was paramount in helping participants to identify the intricacies of activities and interactions, which allowed them to identify/view where they were using the Circle of Courage as a lens. In conversations with students, it was clear that their understanding of the Circle of Courage helped them to self-direct their learning. Conversely, educators could also support students in their learning based on where they felt students were (educator self-directed support for students).

**Reflection Question #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

I was allotted the opportunity to work with students during this process by helping to educate them on the history of Canada as it pertained to Indigenous people. Some Dorintosh students attended the Northwest School Division teacher and student culture camp where they learned about the legacy of Indian residential schools through such activities as the Kairos Blanket Exercise, treaty simulations, lessons on the Circle of Courage and Medicine Wheel, and by interacting with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Through this learning, students gained confidence enough to facilitate a treaty simulation for our FNMI Teacher Lead Learners at the Dorintosh school with the aid of an Elder. Students also helped to facilitate the Kairos Blanket Exercise with me. These activities helped all feel like we belonged and that we were creating a community of learners based on a moral imperative to educate and inform others.

Additionally, the staff at Dorintosh Central School worked side by side with students, parents, community members, Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and the Indigenous community at large to create a welcoming atmosphere and a sense of belonging in and out of the school environment.



**Reflection Question #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.**

Through my participation in supporting a culture of belonging at Dorintosh Central School, I further developed my understanding of how building/creating authentic relationships is the cornerstone of having a sense of belonging. I genuinely feel that those who participated in this project were empowered to challenge themselves and their ideas about Indigenous people, their culture, and their history, because they felt as though they genuinely belonged.

### **Sid Fiddler (Elder/Knowledge Keeper)**

**Reflection Question #1: Reflect on your experience throughout the research process regarding self-directed learning, Truth and Reconciliation, holistic land-based learning, and their impact on a sense of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

When speaking with Sid over the phone, we were able to have a conversation and reflect on our research project. Sid said, "There is no substitute for Elders and First Nations to communicate, talk about their experiences, and their connection to the land." He described how he was thankful to have the opportunity to do this with our school and stated the importance of providing our students with the opportunity to listen and hear his story. He said, "This is something they would never have experienced without a project like this; they would be left with stereotypes and misinformation about my culture and story." Sid continued to explain the importance of connection and a sense of belonging to the land and land around us.

**Reflection Question #2: Reflect on your experience while contributing and/or participating in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School.**

Additionally, Sid reflected on the importance of culture in our connections and interrelations between people and the land. Meaning, our connections must be developed to begin to advance a concern for our environment and the land we live on. Thus, helping foster compassion for this connection can translate into an appreciation for our impact on the land. Sid states, "Our interrelatedness with First Nations and Indigenous people can help us understand and perceive others in a different light and break down or address racism, stereotypes from misinformation, or conceptions from the past. Indigenous people have also been led to believe many of these stereotypes about their people. As an Elder engaged in this positive action with Dorintosh School, I became hopeful of change for the better, a process of healing, recovering, and creating a new path for the future."

**Reflection Question #3: Reflect on your experience and participation in supporting a culture of belonging in Dorintosh Central School and how it impacted you and your students.**

Finally, Sid spoke about the impact this project had on him. Sid said, "This opportunity was very good for me. I could interact with students and reshape my experience with Dorintosh staff, students, and community members. It was beneficial because I went in with a mindset that student attitudes and behaviour may reflect my previous experiences, but working with this community quickly changed my mindset. This relationship gave me hope, a sense that this is what education should be about."

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