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Educators Doing the Deep, Unsettling Work of Treaty Education

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Abstract

This research explores the transformative journey of 23 participants engaging in culturally immersive experiences related to treaty education over a two-year period. Through reflective and experiential learning, participants developed critical consciousness and a deeper understanding of their treaty responsibilities. Key themes include inner work; Indigenous ways of teaching and learning; building relationships, connections, and community; treaty responsibilities; and holistic impacts. Drawing on participant quotes and relevant scholarship, this study highlights the potential of a community of educators doing the deep, unsettling work of treaty education to foster personal growth, reconciliation, and meaningful connections with Indigenous communities.

Situating Self: Researchers and Participants

We recognize the paramount importance of situating ourselves within this research, acknowledging the influence of our various social identities, backgrounds, experiences, biases, and perspectives. These multi-faceted identities, encompassing gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, geographical location, and more, deeply shape our worldview and perspectives. Throughout this study, we actively engaged with our own positionalities and encouraged research participants to do the same. This critical reflexivity was essential, given the research's focus on educators' understanding of their identities and treaty obligations and how this awareness might affect their planning and teaching practices.

Raquel is a white settler woman residing and working on Treaty 4 land, the traditional territory of the Cree (nêhiyawak), Saulteaux (Nahkawé), Nakota, Dakota, Lakota, and the Métis Nation. Her ancestors are from East Galicia, Belgium, France, and Ireland. Raquel identifies as a cisgender, heterosexual, able-bodied woman and acknowledges the privilege inherent in these identities. As an Instructional Coach in South East Cornerstone Public School Division, Raquel views situating herself as integral to understanding her treaty responsibilities as a settler and unpacking her role as a treaty relative.

Michael's familial roots extend to western Europe (Great Britain and France), although he is a fourth-generation Canadian. Beyond his ancestral background, Michael acknowledges his birth in Treaty 11 lands, upbringing in the Robinson-Superior Treaty lands, and lived experiences within Treaty 14, 19, 22 and 23 lands, as well as residence within Treaties 9, 8, and most recently, Treaty 4.

The research participants consisted of a group of voluntary educators predominantly from South East Cornerstone Public School Division, comprising 38 schools and serving approximately 8,000 students. This diverse group encompassed teachers, administrators, community education liaisons, student service counselors, instructional coaches, and researcher-participants. The first year saw 21 research participants, with 23 participating in the second year, and 15 individuals participating in both years. Nearly all participants in both years identified as white, with two exceptions: Jo, a white immigrant from England, and Jasmine, an immigrant from India. Arrii, joining in the second year, identified as Métis. The participants' experience levels ranged from first-year educators to those with 16 or more years of experience. This information is further summarized in Table 1:

Year 1 (2020-21)	Year 2 (2021-22)
21 participants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19 settlers / 2 immigrants • 5 male / 16 female • 17 educators (4 administrators, 2 coordinators/coaches, 11 teachers), 4 non-educators. 	23 participants* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20 settlers / 2 immigrants / 1 Métis • 4 male / 19 female • 21 educators (3 administrators, 5 coordinators/coaches, 13 teachers), 2 non-educators.
* 15 participants took part in both years	

Table 1: Participants

While some participants have elected to be identified by their first name, others have selected pseudonyms.

Background and Relevance of Research

In this section, we aim to provide an in-depth exploration of the background and significance of the research, with the goal of offering insights into the landscape of treaty education in Saskatchewan. In 2008, the Saskatchewan government announced mandatory treaty education for all K-12 students in the province, following years of groundwork by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner to develop educational materials supporting educators in integrating treaty-related content into their classrooms (Tupper, 2011; Hildebrandt et al., 2016). Despite the foundational importance of treaties to Canadian history, “most Canadians know very little about them” (Miller, 2009, as cited in Hildebrandt et al., 2016, p. 18). This knowledge deficit extends to educators, many of whom were taught a dominant nationalist narrative that downplays the colonial violence inflicted on Indigenous peoples by the government.

Instead of confronting the truths of Canadian history, educators often encountered the sanitized narrative that “the numbered treaties in Western Canada between First Nations and the British Crown ensured that the land could be settled ‘peacefully’ rather than through a process of war and bloodshed” that had occurred in the United States (Hildebrandt et al., 2016, p. 18). This narrative glosses over the systemic injustices endured by Indigenous communities, such as government-imposed starvation, the implementation of the Indian Act, the pass system, residential schools, and the dispossession of Indigenous lands. St. Denis (2011) further contends, “Aboriginal story, agency, voice, knowledge, and experience are often subjugated in kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) curricula in the service of normalized mythologies of Canada as a multicultural and benevolent nation” (as cited in Couros et al., 2013, p. 544). In other words, rather than centring Indigenous peoples’ experiences and acknowledging the ongoing legacies of colonialism, the school system often positions Canada as a peaceful, tolerant, multicultural nation.

Furthermore, some educators admit to receiving limited or no education about treaties during their schooling, perpetuating the erasure of Indigenous history and presence on the land. This collective historical amnesia works to “affirm white settler identities as hardworking, industrious, and as embodying the pioneering spirit necessary to the early economic success of Canada” while obscuring the violence and dispossession inflicted upon Indigenous peoples by colonial forces (Hildebrandt et al., 2016, p. 18). Additionally, these narratives reinforce the myth of meritocracy, or the “belief that success in life can be attributed to personal merit such as hard work and natural talent,” which overlooks systemic barriers faced by racialized groups in accessing resources and opportunities (McLean, 2018, p. 32).

Therefore, although treaty education has been mandatory for over a decade, “many of the very best and most well-intentioned teachers continue to struggle with how best to implement treaty education in their classrooms” (Couros et al., 2013, p. 547). Many Saskatchewan educators wish to integrate treaty education and Indigenous perspectives

into their curricula but do not have an in-depth understanding of the content because it was not a substantial part of their educational experiences. Educators being asked to infuse Indigenous perspectives across subject areas are naturally finding it challenging to let go of the “more comfortable stories of Canada that they have been told and grown accustomed to telling” (Donald, 2009, p. 4). A lack of comprehensive understanding, coupled with entrenched narratives of Canadian history, poses significant challenges for educators seeking to adopt a more inclusive approach.

Moreover, because of the complicated relation of non-Indigenous educators to Indigenous pedagogy, “non-Indigenous educators may so fear being offensive that avoidance of Indigenous questions becomes the ‘moral’ way of avoiding addressing the Indigenous-settler relationship” (Kovach, 2013, p. 118). Non-Indigenous educators may step back from integrating Indigenous perspectives or teaching about the treaties, paralyzed with anxiety over making mistakes or perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Acknowledging these challenges, this research underscores the importance of critical reflection on settler colonialism, white privilege, and anti-oppressive pedagogy as foundational elements of effective treaty education. By engaging in this critical self-analysis, educators can better understand their own positionality in relation to treaty responsibilities, paving the way for more authentic and meaningful teaching practices (Aamodt, personal communication, 2020).

Purpose, Scope, and Objectives

Recognizing the challenges articulated by classroom educators, encompassing issues such as entrenched settler epistemologies, colonial teaching approaches, and a general lack of confidence in incorporating treaty education and Indigenous perspectives (Webb and Mashford-Pringle, 2022), the researchers deemed it imperative to “just start finding ways to embrace Indigenous knowledge, beliefs and practices within all schools” (Chief, 2018). Generously supported by the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research Into Teaching in Saskatchewan, this participatory action research initiative ran from September 2020 to June 2022. The primary aim was to investigate how developing a community of educators committed to doing the unsettling work of treaty education might positively influence the implementation of treaty education in their schools. Our objective was to provide a relational community of educators to support one another as we unpacked our identities, disrupted dominant narratives of Canadian history, reflected on our treaty responsibilities, and built relationships with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers. We facilitated a series of collaborative learning days over two school years, which included virtual sessions (due to COVID-19 restrictions) and in-person learning days with representatives from Ocean Man, Pheasant Rump, and White Bear First Nations.

During the 2020-2021 school year, we hosted three and a half collaborative learning days on Microsoft Teams, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous presenters shared their knowledge and experiences on various topics. We had presenters from Ocean Man, Pheasant Rump, White Bear First Nations, the University of Regina, and the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teachers Education Program. Some session topics included Disrupting Settler Stories, Understanding Residential School Experiences, Cultural Connectedness, Nakota Language and Land-Based Learning, Métis Identity and Community-Based Learning, and more. Research participants had the opportunity to listen, ask questions, and participate in discussions within designated breakout sessions.

During the 2021-2022 school year, research participants were invited to participate in a Sweat Lodge ceremony led by Elder Pete Bigstone from Ocean Man First Nation. This ceremonial event was offered as an additional opportunity alongside our scheduled collaborative learning days, with a total of seven research participants in attendance. Our initial joint learning day involved engaging with Garrick Schmidt, a land-based educator and owner of Eagle Ridge Dog Sled Tours, alongside several Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and educators from White Bear. This day provided a relatively unstructured environment, allowing participants to partake in activities such as dog sledding, snowshoeing, and informal gatherings around the fire and in the warm-up area, fostering connections among themselves and with the Indigenous facilitators.

Our second learning session unfolded at Ocean Man First Nation, where our research participants joined the Ocean Man school staff for a dedicated professional development day. Activities included communal tipi raising and hand games, followed by smaller group rotations through various learning stations. These stations included traditional

medicine teachings, Nakoda language and cultural teachings, and sewing and beading medicine bags. Our subsequent learning day transpired at the Medicine Wheel located at Pheasant Rump First Nation. Here, Indigenous facilitators led participants through tipi raising, a tour of the Medicine Wheel site, and a series of six small group sessions. Morning sessions focused on teachings related to Sweat Lodge and Sun Dance ceremonies, as well as stories associated with the Medicine Wheel. In the afternoon, participants engaged in activities including the Moccasin Game, a session on supporting 2SLGBTQQIA+ students, and explorations of Indigenous art, healing, and connections. This project afforded research participants the invaluable opportunity to cultivate relationships with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers, immerse themselves in cultural teachings, collaborate closely with Indigenous educators, and participate in land-based learning experiences.

Research Questions

Our central research question was: How does developing a community of educators to do the unsettling work of treaty education influence educator practices in rural Saskatchewan classrooms? The following questions further define the research problem:

- How are educators understanding their identities in relation to treaty?
- How might reframing our mindsets around treaty relationships and responsibilities impact our planning and teaching practices?
- How might considering our treaty responsibilities help us interpret curriculum toward more ethical treaty education?
- How might we disrupt dominant Canadian narratives that deny or ignore past injustices toward First Nations people and the ongoing legacies of colonialism in Canada?
- How might we move beyond teaching treaty as an event in the past to an “active relational process” or a “living protocol” for respectful dialogue and relationships (Kovach, 2013)?

Research Methods and Data Collection

Throughout this project, we focused on building respectful relationships among our research participants and between participants and the Indigenous facilitators who supported our learning. We aimed to practice relational accountability, which means keeping respect, reciprocity, and responsibility at the forefront of the research process (Wilson, 2008). We recognized that “as researchers, we aren’t separate from the process, but rather participate in relationship with what we are learning” (Wilson & Hughes, 2019, p. 9). Therefore, we adopted the stance of researcher-participants, actively engaging in opportunities to challenge our perspectives and reflect on our treaty responsibilities. Employing qualitative data collection techniques, including observations, field notes, one-on-one open-structured conversational interviews, and focus groups, allowed for a nuanced exploration of participants’ experiences and insights. Each research participant contributed to four one-on-one interviews and one focus group over the course of the two-year project, with all interactions recorded and transcribed with explicit participant consent.

Additionally, assuming the dual role of participant-observers during collaborative learning days enabled us to capture contextual nuances and enrich the data collection process. Subsequent data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, facilitating the identification of recurring patterns and themes within the collected data.

Results and Themes

In this section, we explore four emerging themes: inner work and self-learning; Indigenous ways of teaching and learning; building relationships, connections, and community; and treaty responsibilities. Each theme encompasses various subthemes and collectively contributes to the overarching theme of holistic impacts. We incorporate direct quotations from research participants and insights from relevant scholars to provide a comprehensive analysis of the findings.

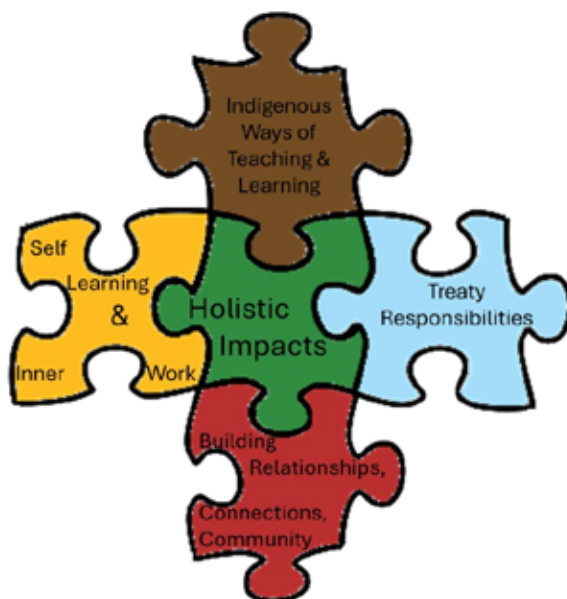


Figure 1. Thematic Connections

Inner Work and Self-Learning

This section explores the theme of inner work and self-learning, focusing on three interconnected subthemes: developing critical consciousness, disrupting settler narratives, and learning our treaty stories.

Developing Critical Consciousness

Many research participants emphasized the significance of the project's professional development days in facilitating what they termed "inner work," which they considered essential for implementing treaty education. Alice articulated the necessity of examining and reflecting on personal beliefs to ensure authenticity in efforts:

You do need to do some inner work and you need to ... really examine your own beliefs, I think, and understandings of treaty and why we're here ... because you want it to be genuine, and I think that's the only way it can be genuine.

Several participants traced their inner work and critical self-reflection back to their university education, where they encountered concepts such as white privilege and engaged in an examination of biases, prejudices, and assumptions. Wanda, for example, highlighted the importance of critical self-reflection during her university years:

As a white person, I come from a position of privilege and to really understand treaty, I have to break that down, what treaty means to me. So I think had I not done the work I've done previously, like through university ... that I could have had a very different mindset going into this and I might not have been as open and willing to learn as I could have been.

Comments like these were predominantly shared by recent graduates, especially those from universities in Saskatchewan, underscoring the efforts of institutions such as the University of Regina, First Nations University, and University of Saskatchewan in preparing teachers to incorporate treaty education. Battiste (2010) emphasizes the importance of “every educator making a commitment to both unlearn and learn – to unlearn racism and superiority so evident in our society and to learn new ways of knowing, valuing others, accepting diversity, and making equity and inclusion foundations for all learners” (p. 18). The universities are working hard to engage pre-service teachers in unlearning racism, understanding white privilege, and experiencing Indigenous ways of knowing.

Additionally, Tammy, an educator with 17 years of experience, highlighted the significance of self-reflection during the professional learning days of the research project:

I'm finding with my students too, teaching treaty outcomes, that there's a lot of reflection involved ... in terms of positioning yourself as a treaty relative, obviously, as a white person ... I had done some reflecting on that in the past, but this [project] required me to do that.

Therefore, many participants expressed that developing critical consciousness about oppression, privilege, and power relations, as well as reflecting on their positionality, were necessary initial steps in teaching treaty education and building relationships with Indigenous peoples.

Disrupting Settler Stories and Dominant Myths

In addition to reflecting on positionality and privilege, online sessions were designed to encourage participants to explore their family history and ancestors' stories. During the first virtual learning day, Elder Pete Bigstone from Ocean Man First Nation and Murray Bird, principal of Ocean Man Education Centre, shared stories about historical events such as smallpox epidemics, buffalo slaughter, the Cypress Hills Massacre, and the impact of government policies on Indigenous communities. They gave local examples, explaining how Ocean Man and Pheasant Rump First Nations were forced to surrender their land and amalgamate with White Bear First Nation in 1901. Qwul'sih'yah'maht-Thomas (2015) declares, “Many stories from Indigenous people tell a counter-story to that of the documented history of Indigenous people in Canada” (p. 183). These narratives challenged hegemonic accounts and facilitated a more accurate understanding of Canadian history among participants. Further, these stories prompted reflection among participants about their ancestors' involvement in the colonial context of Saskatchewan and Canada, as well as their own benefit from these historical events.

Kylee's reflection on her ancestors' homesteading stories exemplified this process:

That one online session that we had about our ancestry and kind of examining our own privileges and conveniences that we've had — that was kind of an eye-opener for me because I, you know, you come from this farming background and you're so proud of your relatives for homesteading ... and yeah, that's okay. But there was a whole bigger piece that I was really missing in my history, and I think that's something that I think about a lot more now and uhm, something that I can teach my students ... There's some humility that needs to go along with that history. But it wasn't all based on their hard work, that there was a lot that was a privilege and a convenience that came along with that.

During that virtual session, participants read and discussed McLean's (2018) article, "We Built a Life From Nothing" White Settler Colonialism and the Myth of Meritocracy." Annie described her realization that settler families' success often came at the expense of Indigenous peoples:

You guys gave us that article that ... kind of brought up the fact that although we think that we worked hard to achieve what we have in our families, it actually came off the backs of others ... to me, that was kind of a catalyst because that made me a little bit more self-aware, then it stuck with me the whole time.

Annie's reflection demonstrates her understanding that "in the same historical moment that [her] family benefited from their position as white citizens, Indigenous people faced policies of genocide" (McLean, 2018, p. 33). In other words, government policies supported white settler families while oppressing Indigenous families through racist colonial policies. Participants became more conscious of problematic narratives in their family stories through the counter-stories provided by McLean, Elder Pete, Murray Bird, and other Indigenous facilitators. They began to critically reflect on the societal inequities produced by historical injustices.

Ultimately, as settler educators, we must unsettle our identities by learning the truths of history, unlearning problematic narratives, and situating ourselves and our ancestors within this story. Regan (2010), poses a crucial question about confronting colonial legacies:

How can we, as non-Indigenous people, unsettle ourselves to name and then transform the settler – the colonizer who lurks within – not just in words but by our actions, as we confront the history of colonization, violence, racism, and injustice that remains part of the IRS legacy today? To me, this is the crux of the matter. I unravel the Canadian historical narrative and deconstruct the foundational myth of the benevolent peacemaker – the bedrock of settler identity – to understand how colonial forms of denial, guilt, and empathy act as barriers to transformative socio-political change. (p. 11)

In other words, unsettling our settler identities is a process that requires ongoing reflection, deconstructing myths, and working through emotions and discomfort to transform ourselves so we can contribute to positive change.

Settler Homework: Learning our Treaty Stories

Apart from challenging dominant narratives and reconsidering family stories, many settler educators acknowledged a disconnection from their ancestry, roots, and cultures. This prompted introspection about the implications of this disconnection and whether efforts should be made to reconnect with European roots and ancestors' cultures and languages. Tammy's reflection on her lack of desire to connect with her German ancestry exemplified this introspection:

There's such a disconnect for us as settlers to this land ... And when she was talking about as settlers, you know, connecting with our own roots, European or whatever they may be. Never in my life have I thought about that actually or like considered or wanted it, like geez, I really wish I knew German or something, like never. And I still don't, actually ... But it's sort of like, why don't I? So anyway, I have a lot more reflecting to do about that.

Similarly, Ron stated, "Being in Shay's session ... her comment about like, your European roots or ancestry or whatever that might be for you ... Like, why am I so disconnected from all that, right? And what does that say?" This sense of disconnection from their ancestors' cultures and languages prompted questions about identity and heritage.

Ermine (2019) asserts that he is grounded in his identity as a Cree person as he can name his ancestors, the land he comes from, and speak his Cree language. In contrast, he discusses how many non-Indigenous people lack a connection to their roots:

The systems that we're talking about are impacting not only Indigenous people but more so all the non-Indigenous people in this country whose memories have been erased about who they are ... what their identity is and what their connections are to the land and what their knowledge system is ... You know, everything about them has been erased (3:28-3:53).

Many of us as settlers lack a solid connection to the places our ancestors come from, their cultural practices, knowledge systems, and languages. The main reason for this disconnection is that many of our ancestors "worked to assimilate into the dominant white culture in order to gain access to social and political power" (McLean, 2018, p. 32). In some cases, our ancestors gave up their customs, traditions, and languages to ensure their children were successful in Canadian society, resulting in estrangement from our ancestral homelands and cultures a few generations later.

Ermine (2019) explains, "Too many of them in the academic world are sent into our community to study us. I tell them, go back and study your own people" (4:36-4:45). Therefore, instead of engaging in extractive research about Indigenous peoples, we should turn the gaze back and study ourselves.

Along the same lines, Muirhead Koops explains the need for settlers to confront the truth of broken treaty promises and understand settler-colonial complicity in historical injustices:

As settler descendants, we often think we can solve our Indigenous-settler problems by learning more about "them." To the contrary, I think we need to learn more about ourselves, our white, settler colonial treaty stories, or more honestly, our broken treaty

stories. Once we've done this homework, we'll actually understand what Indigenous peoples are trying to tell us about our relationships and from there we can start-over, getting to know each other, but not until we've faced our broken-promises-truth. (S. Muirhead Koops, personal communication, April 2023.)

In other words, we must understand how our ancestors did not honour the treaties and how we have benefited from treaties at the expense of Indigenous peoples.

Styres (2019) contends, "To be in good relationship with one another requires a critical conscious awareness and an acknowledgement of whose traditional lands we are now on as well as the historical and contemporary realities of those relationships (p. 32). Therefore, we must study ourselves and learn our treaty stories to prepare ourselves to be in relationship with Indigenous peoples in a good way. In conclusion, this section highlights the necessity for settlers to develop critical consciousness, reflect on their positionality and privilege, deconstruct dominant myths, and understand their own treaty stories as essential first steps in building relationships rooted in truth and accountability.

Indigenous Ways of Teaching and Learning

This section delves into the positive effects of immersing participants in Indigenous ways of teaching and learning during the in-person collaborative learning days in the project's second year, focusing on three key subthemes: exposure to Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems, the impacts of experiential and land-based learning, and collaborative efforts to create ethical space.

Exposure to Indigenous Worldviews and Knowledge Systems

The collaborative learning days exemplified the power of firsthand engagement with Indigenous worldviews, knowledge systems, and teaching methods. Indigenous Knowledge Systems, defined by Settee (2011), encompass traditional knowledge passed down by parents and Elders related to relationships, protocols, ways of knowing, and daily life, including women's knowledge and community knowledge. Throughout these sessions, Elders and Knowledge Keepers generously shared teachings and stories, such as how the Moose Mountain Medicine Wheel was used and where the Moccasin Game came from, passing down wisdom from the late Elder Armand McArthur and others. Hearing these teachings and stories allowed participants to experience Indigenous worldview and spirituality firsthand.

Participants expressed that the informal, small-group settings created a comfortable, familial atmosphere. Arrii, who grew up in First Nations communities and was exposed to many cultural activities throughout her life, identified that the collaborative learning days aligned with Indigenous ways of learning:

I really did enjoy that first very informal day just to get to know each other and kind of bounce around and have those great organic and authentic conversations. And then moving forward into Ocean Man, being fairly structured but still pretty relaxed and small groups that really help connect and kind of learn in more of a traditional manner, whereas like you sit around and listen to the stories, and you ask the

questions and then you participate, right? Like that's a very traditional and holistic-based learning strategy. So I feel like that was really impactful with building the relationships with the communities because we're learning the way that they learn.

Similarly, Lizzy noted that this relational approach resonated with traditional ways of teaching:

But that's how they would have taught traditionally, right? Like they would have done smaller groups or like their children or their family, as opposed to a large academic lecture that the western world tends to view as education, right?

We aimed to centre Indigenous voices and pedagogical practices, offering an alternative to dominant Western approaches to education. Participants appreciated the traditional teaching style, characterized by storytelling, dialogue, and hands-on participation, as it provided an immersive experience of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge systems. As Starblanket (2019) explains, "Treaties are sacred undertakings ... to understand treaty relationships you need to understand the world view and spirituality of those who enter into treaties" (p. 23). Grounded in this relational and spiritual context, participants gained a stronger foundation for understanding contemporary treaty relationships.

Impacts of Experiential and Land-Based Learning

Participants also experienced Indigenous ways of teaching and learning through experiential and land-based activities, such as dogsledding, snowshoeing, and tipi raising. These learning days provided participants with a chance to slow down, breathe, and go with the flow. Jo remarked that the learning days were "rejuvenating and refreshing and cleansing," while Ron described the professional development days as, "PD for the soul." As Ermine (2018) explains, "land-based learning is a form of education that connects learners to the land in ways that engage the interconnecting modes of mind, body, spirit into a symphony of elevated awareness" (as cited in Weenie, 2020, p. 8). In other words, being on the land is healing as it connects us to place and helps us bring our different modes of being together. Kylee shared a realization about the connection between land, spirituality, and mental health:

One [thing that stuck out] was my complete lack of awareness of spirituality. And actually, a couple years ago, I had gone to a friend that does body talk. And so, she's given me the whole lecture about physical and mental health. And she says, 'What do you do for spiritual health?' And I was like, 'nothing ... moving on.' And so that was something really interesting to me that Indigenous culture does such a good job of that, and my own culture is just zero. And so, it was an important finding. I think the connection to the environment and that bigger connection to mental health was something that was kind of like an 'AHA' moment being out at the Medicine Wheel the first time.

Participants appreciated the opportunity to be out on the land and felt the restorative power of land-based education for mind, body, and spirit.

Next, participants valued the experiential learning because it helped them feel more confident with land-based skills and afterwards, they were able to speak from firsthand experiences. For example, John describes his feeling of increased confidence after raising several tipis:

Definitely the experience of going to all the communities and doing these things ... raising the tipis and being involved in that process and putting those things together are huge, especially for confidence. I'm just thinking of, you know, when we set up the tipi ... We did it twice in Ocean Man. And then we did it again in Pheasant Rump. So I think once we got to Pheasant Rump, I know I felt more confident in what we did ... I think our group did too.

Kevin describes the power of sharing firsthand experiences with students, friends, and family members:

I just love the fact that I can now speak firsthand. Hey, I'm with Elder Pete, and I did this and we did this and we had this experience and I was in my first sweat and it's so much, so much more powerful to say, 'I did this and this is how I felt and this is the connection I made,' you know, than reading out of a textbook, which is something I'm guilty of, right. I'm trying to get as much content into my science as I can, and it's just so much easier now to say, well, you know, when we talk about the solstice and we talk about the Medicine Wheel and I can have real world examples and I pull up the pictures from my phone ... And of course, my confidence is much higher ... I just love sharing with everybody and not even just my students, but with my family and with my friends

Rather than relying on textbooks or other resources, Kevin felt empowered to speak from personal experiences and the knowledge he had gained from local Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Beyond personal growth, participants recognized the educational value of experiential and land-based experiences for their students. For example, Kylee explains her desire to engage students in experiential learning:

... To be able to have some new experiences, like the dogsledding or the beading or something that I never would have been able to experience before ... That's something that I feel like I can show my kids ... and I can take my kids to those, you know, events or to those people and pass on that knowledge.

Similarly, Wanda describes how excited her social studies' students became about land-based opportunities when she shared her experiences with them:

... We could kind of talk about what I've experienced and share about that, and it excited my kids, like, they want to go ride the dog sleds. They want to go to the Medicine Wheel. They want to do all these things that I've done. They're so jealous that I get to do it ... But it's kind of lit a fire under me to kind of hopefully offer these experiences to the kids to let them experience it. So it's not just information they get off a textbook or YouTube or whatever resources that we can find that are available to us ... I'm just grateful to have the experiences to be able to share them with my students and my colleagues.

Many participants expressed the desire to plan and facilitate school events, field trips, and land-based learning opportunities for their schools or classes, and many stepped up as leaders in their schools to do so during the year of our research project and the following school year.

Weenie (2020) asserts, "I have come to believe that firsthand experience is the best teacher, especially about culture. I feel that I cannot effectively teach my students unless I have experienced these cultural aspects for myself. I cannot speak to them unless I have experienced them" (p. 10). Likewise, many of the local Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and facilitators involved in this project emphasized that we must experience cultural ways before we can teach about them.

Therefore, as non-Indigenous educators, it is imperative for us to engage directly with Indigenous cultures, worldviews, and land-based learning practices in order to enhance the depth of our instructional capabilities. Engaging in experiential and land-based learning allowed participants to experience the restorative power of connecting with land, increased their confidence with land-based skills, allowed them to share their firsthand experiences with others, and inspired them to provide these opportunities for their students.

Working Together to Create Ethical Space

Efforts to create ethical space were foundational to the project's collaborative approach. Ermine (2007) explains, "Ethical space is formed when two societies, with disparate worldviews, are poised to engage each other" (p. 193). He builds on Poole's description of ethical space, which includes a photograph from the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia:

In the picture, two men are sitting on a park bench looking at each other. One man is dressed in army fatigues and is clearly representative of the dominant and occupying force, while the other man, dressed in civilian, peasant clothing, clearly represents one of the "occupied" (p. 194).

Using this park bench analogy, Ermine invites us to reflect on the "electrifying nature" of the space between the two men and contends that a similar electrifying space is created when Indigenous and Western knowledge systems meet. He explains, "What remains hidden and enfolded are the deeper level thoughts, interests and assumptions that will inevitably influence and animate the kind of relationship the two can have" (p. 195). To begin to create ethical space, we had to acknowledge that the Indigenous facilitators and non-Indigenous participants came to this research project with different worldviews, knowledge systems, and levels of power and privilege.

Donald (2009) describes ethical relationality as an "ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference, but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (p. 6). Put differently, understanding one another's worldviews and being mindful of our respective positionalities are foundational to developing respectful relationships. For us as white settler researchers with mostly white settler research participants, this meant we had to start with the inner work and self-learning described above, including developing critical consciousness, learning about the effects of colonialism and state violence on Indigenous peoples, unlearning problematic dominant narratives, and getting to know our treaty stories. Much of this focus on learning, unlearning, and ongoing critical reflection occurred during the first year of the project, through the online sessions and one-on-one interviews with participants.

During the second year of the project, we aimed to decentre Western ways of learning and centre Indigenous ways of teaching and learning to work towards creating ethical space. We collaboratively planned the in-person learning days with the Indigenous facilitators, so they were leading the learning days rather than the researchers taking the lead. Positioning the Indigenous facilitators as the leaders and inviting them to share teachings and lead hands-on, land-based learning experiences disrupted the dominance of Western knowledge systems and showed them that we value their knowledge and experiences. For instance, one of the facilitators, Shay McArthur, expressed her surprise at seeing a large group of non-Indigenous individuals gather at the Medicine Wheel to listen to and learn from her and her relatives.

Another way we endeavoured to create ethical space was by starting the second year of the project with an optional Sweat Ceremony. Although not all research participants were able to attend the Sweat, the ones who did reflected on how meaningful the experience was and how it helped build relationships. For example, Abigail describes learning about the Sweat through firsthand experience and listening to the Elders' teachings:

The one [memory] that instantly sticks out in my mind is the Sweat at Elder Pete's, mostly because it was the first experience that I got to be a part of through this Foundation project, and it was also the most personal for me. It was my first real look at, truly the culture and just the passion and authenticity that each kind of piece holds. And I think, for them as well, just based on the conversation that we had last week, how important and sacred the Sweat is. So just to be a part of that was really fulfilling for me to experience that, from my perspective and also to see everything that goes into it from their perspective as well.

The Sweat Lodge ceremony provided an opportunity to build relationships, experience culture and ceremony firsthand, humble ourselves, and learn from the Elders and helpers present.

Moreover, the warm reception and inclusivity extended by Indigenous facilitators played a crucial role in co-constructing ethical space. Participants were deeply impressed by the openness, acceptance, and lack of judgment they experienced from Indigenous facilitators. For example, Rose describes her amazement at the facilitators' attitudes:

I am amazed by the attitude that we were met with. Like, of any people who should be mad when our pasty little faces show up, it would be these people. And I wasn't met with anything except acceptance and non-judgment.

Similarly, Kylee reflects on potential challenges the Elders and Knowledge Keepers faced when asked to share teachings with a group of white settler educators:

It was so nice that they were welcoming and open to [helping us learn]. That's probably hard for a lot of people that have experienced that much trauma and umm, you know, not a very positive experience in their own education. And here they open their hearts to a whole bunch of educators so that we could make this change.

These two quotes speak to how participants recognized the "electrifying nature" of the space (Ermine, 2007) or how our "different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other" (Donald, 2009, p. 6). They were mindful of the difficult emotions

that the Indigenous facilitators might feel as a result of residential school experiences and how many of our ancestors benefited from settler colonialism while their families suffered from colonial violence and broken treaty promises.

Further, participants expressed deep gratitude for the generosity, inclusiveness, and invitations the Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members consistently extended to them. As Marie explains, “their willingness to invite us into their communities and to share culture and ceremony with us filled my heart.” Similarly, John emphasizes these invitations: “They’ve been inviting us to their different events and like different sweats and different ceremonies and things like that. And so just the inclusiveness, I think is really important to mention as well.” Finally, Ron describes feeling humbled by the generosity of the Indigenous facilitators:

Just the generosity of spirit that these people have shown ... to have conversations with us and be willing to share their knowledge and their learning and their traditions and their customs and their spirituality and their teachings with us, like, blows my mind ... I am actually incredibly humbled by it.

The Indigenous facilitators’ invitations, inclusivity, and desire to support participants’ learning were essential elements in creating ethical space.

In summary, the project’s focus on inner work, self-learning, and critical consciousness in the first year laid the groundwork for centring Indigenous knowledge systems in the second year. Through experiential learning and collaborative efforts, participants gained insight into Indigenous ways of teaching and learning, fostering mutual understanding and respect.

Building Relationships, Connections, and Community

This section examines how participants deepened their understanding of treaty education by building meaningful relationships with local Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members. It highlights three key subthemes: connecting through trusted relationships, reframing mindsets around treaty education, and establishing support networks.

Connecting through Trusted Relationships

A key subtheme identified was the crucial role of a “connector” with prior relationships and trust established with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members. Several participants underscored the value of existing relationships, particularly Raquel’s connections, which fostered trust between facilitators and the group. Kevin reflected on a comment made by the principal of Ocean Man School, noting, “I don’t think I was more proud than when Murray Bird said that because of Raquel, you know, he can trust ... he trusts you, and he can trust us.” Similarly, Rose expressed, “I was so proud, listening to them talk about you ... You can see the relationship that you have is thick and there’s a reason for that ... That’s real teaching to me.” For Raquel, Knowledge Keeper Amos McArthur served as the “connector,” introducing her to his relatives and

inviting her to community events. This relational bridge played a pivotal role in fostering trust, strengthening connections, and facilitating meaningful engagement throughout the collaborative learning days.

Reframing our Mindsets Around Treaty Education

In the second year of this project, building relationships with local Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members became a central focus. As discussed earlier, participants recognized inner work as a necessary first step to meaningful connections. Juanda shared this sentiment, emphasizing that treaty education extends beyond teaching facts:

I think treaty work is a lot more complicated than learning some facts or learning some strategies. I think in order for treaty work to be holistic and authentic, it has to come from the heart and in my world, that means it starts within.

This perspective aligns with Kovach's (2013) assertion that "treaty is not a 'thing,'" but rather "an active relational process that includes seeking continuous counsel and dialogue on matters that have bearing on the parties it involves" (p. 112). Treaty relationships, therefore, involve truth telling, ongoing dialogue, and partnerships.

Throughout this research project, we intentionally prioritized contemporary treaty relationships over planning lessons for the treaty outcomes. Taking up Kovach's challenge, the focus shifted "beyond teaching treaty as an historical artifact to that of a living protocol for how to exist in a world that is honourable, just, and caring of each other" (p. 116). Reflecting on this shift, Ron noted how the project deepened his awareness of treaty relationships: "I would say it's kind of opened my eyes to it ... Just that awareness that I'm in a treaty relationship and I need to ... I need to see it and look for ways to respect it."

Building off Kovach (2013) and Tupper & Cappello (2008), Muirhead Koops (2025) cautions, "if people think that treaty is a 'thing' to teach, like a box to check off, full of nuts and bolts for mechanical understanding, then they are missing the relational heart of treaty, which Indigenous peoples have been living on this land from time immemorial" (p. 66). Participants recognized that teaching treaty education is more than addressing prescribed outcomes for each grade level; it is heart work, building relationships, and wrestling with the responsibilities of being a good treaty relative. This shift in mindset moved educators away from viewing treaty education as a task to be completed and toward embracing it as a relational and ongoing commitment.

Establishing Support Networks

Participants highlighted the impact of consistent engagement with the same Indigenous facilitators over multiple sessions. Lizzy noted, "the number of times you have contact with people, that's what makes those connections ... so you have that sense of confidence, just that sense of familiarity with them." Others emphasized the value of small group settings, informal conversations, and shared meals in building relationships. Isabella remarked, "sharing a meal with people and talking about little things, in my opinion, is just as important as the broader topics."

These informal moments laid the groundwork for deeper relationships, fostering trust and mutual understanding.

Engaging with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers also deepened participants' connections. Alison reflected on visiting local communities:

This year, seeing everyone who's so local and getting to go around and actually go to Ocean Man, go to Pheasant Rump. It was just so wonderful to have those connections on just that local scale; it's just so impactful and valuable.

Participants stressed that reciprocity is essential in maintaining these relationships. John reflected on the need for balanced exchanges:

In relationship to our responsibilities ... Us going to our First Nations communities and First Nations relatives and asking for ... that knowledge and support. We need to do a lot of work on it being reciprocal, too. So I'm still trying to grapple with, you know, what are some of the things that we can do ... whether it's as a school division or whether it's like personally, what can I do or what can I offer to kind of make it a more equal relationship.

Kylee also shared an example of fostering reciprocity, stating, "I think our school visiting Ocean Man really made some good connections that we're gonna try and keep. So we're inviting them back in the fall to have a big event."

Knowledge Keeper and advisor Amos McArthur offered insight into the value of effort and commitment in reciprocal relationships:

You know, watching my dad [late Elder Armand McArthur] over the years, you know, he took in a lot of non-Indigenous people, and he taught them things because they did the work.

They came out and they learned from him and that was enough to kind of give back, as you say. If someone wants to learn something, especially non-Indigenous people, when they go in and they are putting in that effort, you know, you're going to get a lot of support from those individuals. That's how you kind of give back ... you show the community members you're willing to learn.

Participants recognized that reciprocity begins with showing up to community events and ceremony when invited, contributing in practical ways, such as bringing food or helping cook, and maintaining humility and openness to learning. These actions demonstrated respect and a willingness to build connections. As Starblanket (2019) reminds us, "As a relationship framework, treaty implementation is a continuous process with no end point – it is intended to live on in perpetuity through ongoing engagement, maintenance, and renewal" (p. 25). By prioritizing engagement and reciprocity with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers, we embraced treaties as a model for fostering enduring, respectful relationships.

Moreover, the project facilitated the development of a robust support network among participants. Participants spoke of forming friendships, offering mutual assistance, and establishing a network of like-minded colleagues across the school division. Jaime spoke about the power of collaboration between participants:

To know that there are other people who went through the same experiences, and you can talk to ... It's just another group of people that have that rich knowledge and we can have those rich conversations to back each other up, just collaborate with and to be part of ... a great knowledge base.

Similarly, Abigail emphasized the connections forged through this shared experience:

I just want to say that not only has it built a connection among the leaders that took part and helped us throughout, but it also built the connection, I think, among a lot of us. I didn't know any of you before, uh, this experience. So now even just having somebody else within the school division that you can bounce ideas off of and maybe they know who to ask, or maybe they've already had that experience ... So, I think it's important to pull all of us into this experience as well and understand the important and significant role that we all had because without all of your input, my experience also wouldn't have been the same ... So, to be part of everybody's journey, I feel really humbled and appreciative of that experience.

In essence, the consistent presence of local Indigenous facilitators, combined with small group discussions and informal interactions, fostered a strong support network and meaningful connections across the school division. By engaging deeply with both Indigenous communities and their colleagues, participants built a foundation for lasting, reciprocal relationships.

Treaty Responsibilities

Starblanket (2019) urges us to consider "the transformative possibilities of treaties when they are conceptualized as frameworks for creating and renewing broad and interconnected networks of relationship. These include relations between humans, with other living beings, and with the rest of creation" (p. 13). She invites us to see treaties not as historical agreements or one-time transactions, but as living frameworks that guide our relationships with one another, plants, animals, water, land, and the cosmos. Starblanket further reminds us, "Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have distinct rights and responsibilities that we inherit from our ancestors and the commitments that they respectively made in entering into treaty relations" (p. 13). These responsibilities require ongoing reflection and action to honour the spirit and intent of treaty relationships.

Participants engaged with these ideas throughout the research process, reflecting on their roles and responsibilities within treaty relationships. Their reflections reveal a growing understanding of treaty as a living and relational framework, rooted in respect, reciprocity, and shared commitments. Common themes from interviews and focus groups are summarized in the following table:

Theme	Explanation
Fostering Reciprocal Relationships	Building mutually beneficial connections where all parties contribute meaningfully and gain from the relationship.
Taking Up Invitations from Local Communities	Committing to accept and honour opportunities extended by local communities, fostering inclusion, collaboration, and mutual respect.
Showing Up and Contributing to Community Events and Ceremony	Demonstrating respect and commitment by actively participating in and supporting community events and ceremonies.
Inviting Indigenous Facilitators into Schools	Enhancing educational experiences by incorporating Indigenous perspectives and promoting meaningful cultural exchange.
Protecting the Land	Upholding responsibilities to care for the land as a living partner, respecting its cultural and spiritual significance.
Listening and Holding Space for Others	Valuing and amplifying diverse voices within a supportive environment to ensure all perspectives are heard and respected.
Modelling and Sharing Teachings	Preserving and passing on Indigenous knowledge by sharing teachings and modelling respectful practices.
Following Each Community's Teachings and Protocols	Recognizing and respecting the unique teachings and protocols of each community, demonstrating humility and a willingness to learn.
Paving the Way for Future Educators	Implementing positive changes and resources to support future educators in continuing and expanding on current efforts.

Table 2: Common Statements Regarding Treaty Responsibilities

The following reflections from participants illustrate these themes in action, demonstrating how individuals connect treaty responsibilities to personal and professional growth. Alison's reflections highlight the themes of fostering reciprocal relationships and taking up invitations from local communities:

My responsibility in relationship to treaty is to never stop trying to learn ... take those opportunities that are given out, like the invitations that are being given out to this group. Like, I want to take them, and sometimes getting out of my comfort zone is really hard for me. So it's like, no, you need to be brave and it's time to ... create those connections ... I think I'm realizing that being a treaty relative doesn't have to be a big, complicated thing. Just keep learning, keep doing things with love in your heart, keep building those relationships, keep modelling like be a model of what you'd expect of others ... take risks and creating those connections.

Alison's emphasis on "learning with love in [her] heart" underscores the emotional and relational work integral to building meaningful connections. Through this project, participants created a "community of discomfort," stepping out of their comfort zones as a support network.

Rose emphasized the importance of using her privilege to listen and hold space for marginalized voices:

I think listening is a big part of it, instead of talking, and I think Shay said that a couple times. And being a good human, period. But the other thing that I find that I've done more of is holding space for people ... Clearing the way to make space for people and holding the space for them so that they can talk and their voice can be heard because it's a privilege that we have

Her reflections align with Donald's (2009) concept of ethical relationality, which encourages awareness of positionality and privilege in building respectful relationships.

Juanda highlighted the importance of inviting Indigenous facilitators into schools:

I agree with we take opportunities to participate in these invites, cause it is happening. But I also think that we create these invites as well, and bringing ... inviting into the schools and having those authentic opportunities for students is important ... I think it's important for our kids – and our own kids and our students – to have the knowledge and the power and the confidence to end like ignorant conversations.

Juanda's reflection highlights the potential of authentic learning experiences in addressing ignorance and empowering students. By normalizing the presence of Elders and Knowledge Keepers in schools, educators can pave the way for deeper engagement with Indigenous perspectives.

Tammy shared a profound moment of realization after visiting the Medicine Wheel at Pheasant Rump:

After we were at Pheasant Rump ... being up at the Medicine Wheel was sort of like this big moment for me thinking about ... how we feel connected to the land ... I guess what it means to me to be connected to this treaty land that we live on ... You know, like you're from here. You grew up here, you come from a farming family like I owned land and whatever. And then ... having this moment where I realized like ... Imagine how it must feel, the connection you must have to a piece of land that you know your ancestors have lived on, you know, existed on for like thousands of years ... And when I feel like I have a connection to this land that my ancestors have lived

on for like less than 200 years, I just can't like ... it sort of blew my mind thinking about it that night in the tub. Like reflecting on oh my gosh, Amos lives down the hill from this Medicine Wheel that his ancestors have used as the spiritual place for thousands of years. Like what? I cannot actually wrap my head around how he must feel about that. Like the connection that he feels. And then for them to invite us up there to share it with us. But we, whose ancestors took it from them ... I still can't actually wrap my head around it. And so like when I'm thinking about what does it mean to me to be like a treaty relative? I don't know. Like, it's almost like I don't know anymore. I have to think about it more, you know, like more reflection is required. That was a big realization for me.

Tammy's reflection exemplifies the humility required to understand the depth of Indigenous connections to the land. Indigenous peoples continue to model the spirit and intent of treaty by facing non-Indigenous people as relatives, inviting us into relationship, and generously sharing teachings about how to care for one another and the land.

Participants' reflections illustrate a collective journey toward honouring treaty responsibilities through developing reciprocal relationships, engaging in cultural learning opportunities, and inviting Indigenous facilitators into schools. Together, their insights highlight the importance of fostering meaningful connections, respecting Indigenous knowledge and protocols, demonstrating humility, and modelling these commitments within personal, educational, and community contexts.

Holistic Impacts

Together, the four themes culminate in the final, overarching theme: holistic impacts.

Participants described this experience as multifaceted, influencing both their personal lives and professional practices in profound ways. Kevin captured this sentiment, reflecting, "I think I'm a better teacher because of it, but I think I'm a way better person than I was before." Many participants discussed the power of sharing firsthand experiences with their families, students, colleagues, and friends. John shared his perspective on the unique essence of this professional development:

This PD, it was all about, you know, learning about culture and relationship building and I really feel ... it's separate from PD on unit and lesson planning. I felt like this is more PD almost for the soul and for my heart per se, rather than me explicitly taking something back to the classroom, right. It's more about our work, our personal work towards reconciliation and building those relationships ... Being able to just connect with others and to learn and then to just bring those experiences that you have and share those stories back with the class, I think is also valuable.

Similarly, Ron described how these experiences naturally flowed into his teaching:

Say you come back, you're excited about something, the kids can see it. Or you know ... I'm having, I think, more treaty conversations with my students just because it's on my mind more so it just comes up in odd moments or unexpected ways sometimes, right? Which I think is huge because it's organic, it's natural ... it's not agenda-driven, it's more passion-driven.

These reflections might begin to answer Kovach's (2013) questions: "What if instead teaching treaty was more about teaching through a particular relational lens? What would that look like? ... What if ... we taught as if treaty mattered?" (p. 116). The culturally immersive experiences fostered personal growth and meaningful connections, reinforcing the significance of treaty relationships today and influencing teaching practices in natural and holistic ways.

Along with fostering personal growth and organic conversations, participants described increased confidence and excitement about offering experiential learning opportunities for students. Marie explains:

I think my biggest hesitation prior to being a part of this was I wanted to be able to ... I didn't want to mess things up, right? Like I wanted to be able to teach authentically and from experiences and having the opportunity to meet Knowledge Keepers and Elders in our local communities has given me so much knowledge that I feel like I can share with my students now. So much more compared to what I had started with ... Having those relationships that we can connect with to take our students out to experience, I'm talking about in the future, taking students to powwows and things like that. I just think the more that we can experience it, build relationships, making connections, it can only benefit our students.

By the end of the project, many participants felt more confident reaching out to Elders and Knowledge Keepers for support, asking questions, and organizing events for their schools. For example, Estevan organized a field trip to Elder Pete's at Ocean Man; Legacy Park Elementary students attended Ocean Man's School Wacibi (Powwow); 33 Central School held a school-wide Indigenous learning day; and Manor School facilitated a school-wide land-based learning day at Saskairie. These activities illustrate the far-reaching ripple effects of this project.

In addition to school events, some participants reported feeling more confident engaging with Indigenous parents and supporting colleagues. Changes in teaching practices were also noted, such as incorporating circle talks, more oral teaching, sharing Medicine Wheel teachings, playing hand games, and listening to Knowledge Keeper JR's Lullaby CD in the classroom. However, most emphasized that these impacts were unplanned, happening organically through conversations and relationships they formed. Jo reflects on the profound personal changes she experienced:

I think as teachers we have to be ... We have to be ourselves, you know, like we just have to be who we are and what we are and that this PD has changed who I am and what I am ... And in that sense, I think that the PD is really quite, has been quite profound and how it's changed me and probably my teaching as well. And I think that's the way this sort of PD works because we're not told to do anything. And I think that's kind of the secret of it. Like when we go to these places, you know, we're challenged to be ourselves. And I think that's what makes the PD work. You know, and it's also rejuvenating and refreshing and cleansing. And I think teachers really need that. And I don't think it has to change our teaching practice; it has to change us. And I think that's what Indigenous people need is for us to be changed.

These reflections underscore the holistic nature of this PD experience, which influenced participants personally and professionally. By fostering meaningful relationships, fostering confidence, and nurturing personal growth, this project created lasting change that continues to resonate within the broader school communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research project emphasized the foundational work of critical self-reflection and learning, enabling participants to confront colonial legacies, deconstruct settler identities, and understand their treaty responsibilities. By centring Indigenous voices and pedagogies, participants embraced holistic, land-based, and experiential learning, deepening their respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and fostering mutual understanding. The project's emphasis on building relationships and community, supported by trusted facilitators and meaningful connections, reframed treaty education as relational and heart-centred work.

Ultimately, this immersive experience cultivated personal growth, inspired culturally responsive teaching, and strengthened participants' capacity to engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities, leaving a transformative and lasting impact on educators and their school communities.

Recommendations from Results

Based on the findings and reflections shared in this study, the following recommendations are made to further enhance the integration of Indigenous perspectives, treaty teachings, and community engagement in educational settings:

1. **Prioritize Inner Work and Critical Self-Reflection:** Ensure that professional development programs include opportunities for participants to reflect on their positionality, privilege, and identities. These programs should encourage participants to confront dominant myths and colonial legacies, fostering self-awareness and accountability.
2. **Centre Indigenous Voices and Pedagogies:** Design professional development opportunities that foreground Indigenous ways of teaching and learning, such as storytelling, experiential learning, and land-based approaches. These methods will foster meaningful connections and mutual understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.
3. **Facilitate Relationship-Building:** Include trusted facilitators or connectors who have established relationships with Indigenous communities. These individuals can help build trust, create safe spaces, and guide participants in engaging in collaborative, culturally respectful learning experiences.
4. **Prioritize Local Connections:** Encourage learning about the local cultures, teachings, and languages by inviting local Elders and Knowledge Keepers to share their knowledge. Programs should focus on integrating local Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into teaching to ensure that education is contextually relevant and respectful of the area's history.
5. **Incorporate Treaty Education as Heart Work:** Frame treaty responsibilities as relational, emphasizing emotional engagement, cultural humility, and the importance of fostering reciprocal relationships with Indigenous communities. This approach encourages participants to view treaty education as an ongoing, meaningful process.
6. **Support Ongoing Community Engagement:** Encourage participants to build long-term connections with Indigenous mentors, parents, and local communities. These relationships should extend beyond the classroom to create a sustainable, interconnected support system for educators and students alike.
7. **Promote Holistic and Experiential Learning:** Provide educators with immersive, hands-on experiences that integrate land-based and cultural learning. These experiences will increase educators' confidence in implementing these strategies with their students, deepening their understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

8. **Develop Support Networks:** Establish consistent networks of peer support and mentorship to sustain learning, share challenges, and celebrate successes. These networks will provide a sense of community for educators as they continue their professional development and work toward reconciliation.

Possible Avenues for Future Study

Future Review of Progress

A longitudinal study tracking participants over time could offer valuable insights into the enduring impact of their experiences. Key questions to explore include: How did participants continue to develop and maintain relationships with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and fellow research participants? Were the shifts in their perspectives sustained, and how did these changes influence their teaching practices over time?

Impact on Teaching Practices and Student Learning

This research primarily focused on the personal growth and development of teachers, particularly their self-efficacy in treaty education. However, it also raises important questions about the broader implications: In what ways did participants' enhanced critical consciousness and reflective practices influence their teaching methods and classroom dynamics? Did these transformations create meaningful learning experiences for students? Furthermore, did the relationships participants formed during the project lead to sustained opportunities for schools and students, or did the impacts diminish after the project concluded?

Balancing Reflection and Action

The first year of the project emphasized inner work, inviting participants to learn about colonial legacies, disrupt dominant myths, and reflect on their ancestry and familial stories. In contrast, the second year incorporated more hands-on, positive learning experiences centred around connections and relationship-building. These shifts prompt critical reflection: Were participants sufficiently challenged to engage in deep self-reflection while participating in collaborative relationship-building activities? Could future initiatives more effectively integrate introspection within active, hands-on experiences?

As Pam Palmater's (2018) lecture, "If it feels good, it's not reconciliation" suggests, meaningful reconciliation requires discomfort and reparations. How does this perspective align with the outcomes of the second year of the project? Could the removal of COVID-19 constraints have allowed for a more balanced integration of reflective and collaborative experiences?

Expanding Métis Connections

The project's engagement with Métis perspectives, while present, was limited. The first year featured Brenna Pacholko, a Métis SUNTEP professor, presenting Métis 101, and the second year included Garrick Schmidt, a Métis dog sledding facilitator. However, most relationships and understandings developed through the project were heavily weighted toward local First Nations communities. Future initiatives should prioritize deepening connections with Métis communities, including building relationships with Métis/Michif Old Ones, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural practitioners. Specific actions could include integrating Métis teachings into project activities, inviting Métis representatives to co-develop programming, and fostering sustained collaborations to ensure a more balanced and inclusive approach to treaty education.

By addressing these avenues for future study, we can continue to deepen our understanding of the long-term effects of this work, enhance its impact on teaching and learning, and broaden the inclusivity of the relationships we cultivate.

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