

JUMPING THROUGH SACRED HOOPS: MULTI-ETHNIC INDIGENOUS IDENTITY &  
APPROACHES IN HEALTH & WELLNESS EDUCATION

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**Title**

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State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards for the degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## ABSTRACT

As a result of historical trauma, it is paramount for Indigenous communities to take control of their health and wellness today in order to maintain the survival of Indigenous people. This study examines the perceptions of multicultural health educators' views on the effectiveness of using multi-ethnic approaches for health education in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. In this study, data were collected using interviews and online surveys of multi-ethnic Indigenous wellness educators. The data analysis of this study applied appreciative inquiry, which empowers its practitioners to explore innovative practice while being an agent of change by challenging the dominant power (Hung et al., 2018). An innovative practice in this study utilized a self-created medicine wheel as an analytical tool for program evaluation.

The findings of this study revealed the Belcourt Youth Activities Program took a multi-ethnic approach to Indigenous wellness education. The data analysis indicated the following results: (1) The use of community-based learning and land-based learning strategies contributed to the concept of culture as medicine; (2) perceptions of culture as medicine in relationship between both individual health and cultural survival was preventive, not curative; (3) Belcourt Youth Activities Program educators were more likely to report their perceptions of a positive health outcome of healthy relationships, respect for sport, having a positive attitude, and carrying knowledge into everyday life among student program participants as a result of the cultural education if they worked with the program for a longer period of time; (4) multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous education were viewed as a tool for decolonization by Belcourt Youth Activities Program educators; and (5) the use of multi-ethnic Indigenous approaches to education builds a sense of community and helps us survive in the evolving world today to allow us to work together to understand the many categories of cultural identities present in one area. The

results of this study can be used to address the current gaps in literature in terms of multi-ethnic Indigenous identity and its relation to cultural education initiatives. Multi-ethnic approaches to education are not only culturally sustaining but allow for cultural survival within Indigenous communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What seemed like a never-ending journey has finally come to an end—I have finished my dissertation. There have been countless people that have helped me throughout the years to meet this goal that I will forever be indebted to in this lifetime. I am thankful for the lessons that were passed down by my ancestors and the stories that helped to shape me into the person that I am today. I am also thankful for those Indigenous health educators who shared their experiences of multi-ethnic cultural education as a health intervention practice. I am so unbelievably grateful to each of you as this would have not been possible without your help. Each of you will continue to impact my work and I thank you.

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation and doctoral program journey to my family. This journey has had a compass along the way, my son, Sage. You have motivated me to accomplish my goals, influenced my research, and helped me to see a world that I never knew existed. I could have never done this without you, my little love. Also, without the love and support of my mom (Charmaine), brother (Brian Jr.), nephews (Brian III & Oliver), and my son; I may have wanted to quit a long time ago. I owe each of you the world and I am happy to have such a supportive family in my life. I am so lucky to have each of you.

I must also dedicate my study to my grandfather, Edward Joseph Johnson (November 12, 2015), cousin, Evan Thomas Hamley (February 11, 2019) and dear friend, Cleo Cantlon (December 23, 2015). Nobody going through their doctoral program wants to experience such a great loss in their lives, but these angels have cheered for me since the beginning. I can only dream to achieve the many things they wanted for me, which is why they have instilled in me the story of the dreamcatcher. A motivational analogy that has followed me the last few years and kept me going in times of heartache. Also, to my grandmothers, Mabel Davis and Leona Mae Johnson, the memories of your stories growing up has had a profound impact on my life and my research. This dissertation is dedicated to each of your memories.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation my late father, Brian Johnson (January 5, 2019). You were there from day one in my program. During every meltdown, stressful scenario, and celebration, you were there. It hurt to realize that you would not be here when I finally made it to the end. When I lost you, I questioned if this was something that I still wanted for myself. I wanted to quit—but it was your will for me to keep going that helped me push through it all. I wish you were here to see me finish, but I know you are looking down on me beaming with

pride. This was your greatest wish for me. Thank you for the woman you helped me become. You wanted me to become the first doctor in our family. Dad—I did it. Gimikwenimin (I'm thinking of you).



## PREFACE

There were seven prophets that came to the Anishinaabe, which are referred to as the Seven Fire Prophecy. The prophets came at a time when the people were living a full and peaceful life on the North Eastern coast of North America, and they left the people with seven predictions of what the future would have in store for them. The prophecies were referred to as the Seven Fires and each fire's prediction discussed particular points in time that would come in the future of the Anishinaabe/Ojibway people.

The first prophet said to the people of the Great Migration. A time when they were to leave their homes by the sea to search for the land in the shape of the great turtle. This turtle island would bring forth both the beginning and the end of their journey. The second prophet said that while the people will be camped by a body of water, the direction of the Sacred Shell will be lost, and the birth of a girl will point them back to their traditional ways. The third prophet said that the people will find their right path to the land where "food grows upon the waters." This is the land where they must move their families. The Fourth Fire was originally given to the people by two prophets, and they both came as one. They told of the coming of the New People or the light skinned race. The first prophet said that if they come wearing the face of brotherhood, it will bring wondrous change that will unite them as a mighty nation. The second prophet warned that if they come wearing the face of death, it will bring forth suffering, poisoned waters, and fish that were unfit to eat.

The fifth prophet said that in the time of the Fifth Fire, there will come a time of great struggle that will affect the lives of all Native people. One would come forth bearing the promise of great joy and salvation. If the people accept this false promise and abandon their teachings, they will cause the near destruction of the people. The prophet of the Sixth Fire said

that during the time of the Sixth Fire, it will be apparent that the promise from the Fifth Fire would be a false promise. Those who were deceived by this promise will take their children away from the teachings of the Elders. Grandsons and granddaughters will turn their backs away from their elders. Our Elders will lose their reason for living and their purpose in life. A new sickness will come among the people and our balance would be disrupted.

The seventh prophet, said to look different from the other prophets, was young and had a strange light in his eyes. He said that during the time of the Seventh Fire, the New People will emerge. They will need to retrace their steps that was left behind and rediscover the teachings. This will guide them back to their Elders who will guide them along their journey, but many of the Elders will have fallen asleep. They will awaken with nothing to offer. Other Elders will remain silent, as no one asks anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the Elders, as the task the New People asks of them will not be easy. If the New People will remain strong in their quest for the teachings, there will be a rebirth of the Anishinaabe Nation. The Sacred Fire will again be lit. This is the time that the light skinned race is given a choice between two roads and if they choose the right road, it will light the Eighth and final fire. This final fire will bring us eternal peace, love, brotherhood, and sisterhood. If they make the wrong choice of the roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will return, which will cause much suffering and death to all people. It is believed that the first six fires from the prophecy have come to pass and we are now in the time of the Seventh Fire.

-adapted from tribal elder interview participant

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## CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION

Health disparities<sup>1</sup> that affect Indigenous communities are paramount. Statistics show that Indigenous people experience the worst health disparities in the United States (Espey et al., 2014; Warne & Lajimodiere, 2015). The health outcomes of Indigenous nations are currently among the worst of any population in the United States (U.S.) today. Indigenous people are among the highest at-risk population in almost every health category (Reid, Taylor-Moore, & Varona, 2014). The wellness of Indigenous Peoples in the United States has been compromised due to a colonial history that has led to disproportionate levels of poor health outcomes. The Indian Health System (a government program that is responsible for providing federal health services to federally recognized tribes) has limited funds to provide proper treatment/medication and the limited number of doctors/specialists make it difficult to seek adequate health care. The accessibility to adequate health care is different between reservations and non-reservation communities.

I am an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. I will elaborate more on my identity later in the purpose section of this chapter. As someone who has been directly affected by the lack of health resources on American Indian reservations, I wanted to explore how ties to culture factor into health outcomes. My family has been significantly affected by the disparities in health care on the reservation. I can recall the moments when I would speak to doctors in the Indian Health System about concerns that I had about my son's

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<sup>1</sup> The term health disparities refers to “preventable differences in the burden of disease, injury, violence, or opportunities to achieve optimal health that are experienced by socially disadvantaged populations” (CDC, 2021, para. 1) These populations can be defined by different factors (such as race, gender, education, sexual orientation, income, etc.); however, this study will focus on the socially disadvantage population of Indigenous People that is defined by race.



development. My son had a limited vocabulary, communicated with mostly gestures, did not socialize with other children, would hit his head against toys for stimulation, and his tantrums were getting significantly worse. I was told there was nothing to worry about—he was a late bloomer. It was not until after I had moved away from the reservation for graduate school that I learned of his Autism Spectrum Disorder—which seemed so foreign to me. It was not something we ever discussed in the Indian Health System. I had been told that my son would “grow out of it.” I had been fortunate to receive a diagnosis—even if I had to leave the reservation in order to get it. Early intervention was key to helping my son thrive. In in a short three years off the reservation, we received a diagnosis, assistance with his IEP, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Adaptative Therapy, Brain Stimulation Sessions, and Physical Therapy, all of which helped my son thrive and taught him positive behaviors and coping mechanisms to best suit his needs<sup>2</sup>.

My son and I attempted to live on the reservation shortly after I finished my coursework; I wanted to take my education and give back to my tribe. It was my home, but the lack of resources on the reservation made it impossible for us to stay. My son was learning new negative behaviors from his classmates and the resources available that allowed him to reduce the number of meltdowns were no longer available. There was no adaptive physical education; we waited over a year to even have a physical therapy evaluation, and there was not an OT stimulation room to help him take a brain break. All the coping mechanisms he needed were not offered on the reservation and its schools. I was told by area service providers on the reservation

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<sup>2</sup> I will be weaving in my own stories throughout this dissertation. I will be referring to myself in first person and connect my own experiences as part of the research process, which is part of my own Indigenous research methodology.

that my son was “spoiled” off the reservation. The providers would never be able to give him the same amount of time in therapies—they either did not offer it, or there were too many kids that needed the same therapy and there was a limited number of providers. My son’s therapies were cut by more than half. He started to regress—move backward in his education, and the number of meltdowns increased. There were few days that I was not called by the school to help deescalate a meltdown with my son. It was taking a toll not only on my son’s development and education, but on my mental health as well. I would have anxiety every time the phone would ring with my son’s school number flashing across my caller ID.

In addition to my son’s diagnosis, I was diagnosed with multiple autoimmune diseases. I have Hashimoto’s Disease, Psoriasis, and Psoriatic Arthritis. The Indian Health Service referred me to specialists that could better assist me with my plan of treatment. My specialists lived off the reservation, as a rheumatologist (a doctor that often specializes in autoimmune disorders) and dermatologist (specializes in skin disorders—including psoriasis, which is an autoimmune disorder that attacks skin cells) were needed to help me deal with my own needs. Driving back and forth to my doctors many hours away from us on a regular basis was difficult, especially as a single parent. Our family’s needs for health care that was not offered on the reservation eventually forced us to move away from the reservation to live in a bigger city with more health resources for the both of us. I still have great ties to my community, and my cultural identity is important to me, so it broke my heart to move away. I wanted to give back to my community with the education that I had been blessed with in my life, but because of my family’s personal health care needs, I could not stay.

My story is not uncommon for Indigenous People living on the reservation. The health disparities make us vulnerable to different health conditions, but the lack of resources related to

health care cause a gap for those of us trying to seek help. What I mean by lack of resources in the Indian Health System are the unavailability of medically necessary therapies and medications. An example of this would be how I cannot access my psoriatic arthritis medication because “it is not a formulary medication and there’s no money to order the new one.” A formulary medication refers to the drug list of medications that a health care service/plan covers with its benefits. A non-formulary medication refers to the special ordered medications that are often not covered by insurance (in this instance, the Indian Health Service). Instead of trying to come up with solutions to access my needs for medication, I was simply denied what my doctor recommended for my care. There are many families that cannot get the help that they desperately need; they have to travel to other health care facilities (something that is difficult for many families), or they have to move (not unlike my family).

Given my experience with unequal health care access, I researched how this disparity came to be. In my research, I found that many believe that historical trauma was at the epicenter of Indigenous health disparities. Historical trauma refers to “community massacres, genocidal policies, pandemics from the introduction of new diseases, forced relocation, forced removal of children through Indian boarding school policies, and prohibition of spiritual and cultural practices,” over many generations (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 316). Historical trauma has had major consequences on the general health status of the population. According to Adamsen (2018), “It is believed the cultural trauma experienced by this population is responsible for the epidemic of disease and decline in health” (p. 2).

A primary example of trauma as a sole factor in the decline of health in Indigenous communities is that all chronic conditions (including the high percentage of diabetes) were virtually absent in Indigenous communities before assimilation (McLaughlin, 2010). Historical

trauma “is conceptualized as a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation—ethnicity, nationality, and religious affiliation. Forced colonization is directly linked to the negative effects on Indigenous health outcomes (attributing to the decline of health related to all chronic conditions).

Historical trauma is an area that has received a lot of study and has been linked to the poor health outcomes among Indigenous communities. It is the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events” (Brave Heart, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998; Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 320). This has led to major consequences on the general health status of this population. The effects of forced colonization of Indigenous people has not only caused historical trauma but has been linked to the detrimental health outcomes of the Indigenous populations as a result of this trauma.

After learning of historical trauma in relation to the declining health outcomes among Indigenous communities, I thought of my childhood and the stories that were passed down to me by my grandmother. She taught me of the resilience of my people and our history. I grew up with the stories of our people in battle, how we fought for territory, and how we fought to keep our culture. She told me that written history was often wrong, because it was not often told from our point of view. My grandmother taught me that there was power in our stories and in our people. We overcame much battle, heartache, and we are still here today—we still have our culture, despite the many attempts of stripping it away from us by our colonizers. It was these lessons from my grandmother that became an integral part of my identity—it led me to a question that influenced my research. How does cultural education influence health outcomes in Indigenous People?

I paired these ideas with an idea that was introduced to me by my cousin. She told me of “culture as medicine.” This term refers to the notion of having stronger ties to one’s culture makes for a healthier lifestyle. Medicine is not just something that we get over the counter or at the doctor’s office (that is Western medicine). Many Indigenous families (like my own) believe that the medicine is in the traditional teachings that we pass down from generation to generation. Culture as medicine means that the medicine is in the teachings that we pass down to our younger generations in hopes to prevent future health and wellness issues. We can improve our health by knowing and practicing our traditional Indigenous teachings. Culture is also pluralistic, as it is reflective of our own individual lives and the factors that influence them. It can be race, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, and so forth. My own culture is influenced by being a “mixed blood” Indigenous person: I am both Indigenous and French. I know when I had deeper ties to my own culture, I was an overall healthier person. I enjoyed dancing in powwows, eating foods from recipes that my family has passed down over the years, sitting in sweat lodge, smudging, jigging, listening to fiddle music, and taking walks to pick berries. These were only just a few things that made me feel healthier and maintain a healthier weight. As I got older, my ties to my culture were not as deep. I outgrew my regalia to continue to dance and became less active. Slowly over time, I stopped doing the things I grew up doing. I always had ties to my culture, but I lost some of those lessons over time. It made me question if the rediscovery of my culture in my adult years could potentially make me a healthier person. This question helped to drive this study.

In order to better answer this question, I wanted to first better understand the history that caused the historical trauma that led to the declining health outcomes. The history of Indigenous

People<sup>3</sup> is comprised of a number of traumatic events that have devastated the population and that have left a scar on younger generations. There were significant occurrences in Indigenous history that directly contributed to the historical trauma of overall Indigenous populations—the Indian Removal Act (1830), Dawes Allotment (1887), and the Termination Acts (1953). It was these two acts that were passed that not only affected one tribe, but all tribes. The Indian Removal Act granted President Andrew Jackson the ability to force the relocation of many Indigenous persons, which eventually became known for the Trail of Tears. The Dawes Allotment granted permission for the president to confiscate and redistribute tribal lands, which led to the loss of lands and destruction of traditions (as they could not be recognized as ‘American’ if their Indigenous traditions continued). The Termination Acts were a series of different laws and policies aimed at assimilating Indigenous into mainstream American society. All these policies disrupted Native culture.

There have been over 600 treaties and agreements that were entered into between tribal nations and its colonizers throughout history (Duran, Duran, Yellow Horse Brave Heart, & Yellow Horse-Davis, 1998). In many instances, tribes were coerced into signing various agreements and treaties as a result of unjust practices that were written in English, which resulted in the forfeiture of land among many tribes (Duran et al., 1998). As the United States continued to grow, Indigenous people would continue to experience major losses through treaties, war,

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout my dissertation, I will be using the term “Indigenous Peoples.” According to the United Nations, “Indigenous Peoples” is a term used to describe “Indigenous communities, peoples and nations...having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, and consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them” (United Nations, 1992, p. 2). This is an important distinction in my critical theories about Indigenous Peoples, as the terms American Indian and Native American are from a colonized set of terms.

genocide, and forced colonization. Through these acts, the federal government gained access to Native lands and stripped Indigenous populations not only of their territory, but also areas where they hunted, gathered, built their economies, and held special spiritual ceremonies.

Since this dissertation is through the School of Education, it is also important to note the sad history of Indigenous education. Indian Boarding schools was a formal English-only education system, which attempted to strip the culture away from the Indigenous as an attempt to colonize the Native populations. The purpose of boarding schools was to suppress the cultural identities and traditional ways of Indigenous children. Children were relocated far from their families and homeland. Once relocated, Indigenous children were not allowed to speak their language or practice their traditional ways (Jacobs, 2006). If children refused to comply by engaging in their cultural activities, they were threatened with corporal punishment, ostracism, and invocation (Jacobs, 2006). –The boarding school program was based on industrial and agricultural skills, as it was believed that that Indigenous children would never advance beyond the lower class of American society (Edwards & Patchell, 2009).

Indigenous students are still continuously affected by the colonized educational system. Western academic institutions, scholarship, and doctrines (which I discuss in this chapter) support the dominant discourse when approaching research, which demonstrates that Indigenous people are continuously being affected by colonialism. Tribal history notes that when the early settlers tried to colonize Indigenous Peoples, they established their domination over the Indigenous culture. In my early readings, I came across a storytelling example that demonstrates the dominance over Indigenous education through an Indigenous lens. Shawn Wilson (2008) in his book, *Research is Ceremony*, recaps the story of the coyote who goes to college (an oral narrative story) and majors in Indigenous Studies. After going to all of his classes, he realizes

every teacher is a non-Native teaching from a non-Native book. As a result, the coyote did not want to bother continuing his studies from the school he was attending, because he wanted to learn Indigenous studies from an Indigenous source (Wilson, 2008). This is common in academia—which is why Indigenous education needs to be approached with sensitivity to the knowledge and culture of Indigenous people. It relates back to the belief that work done *for* Indigenous tribes also needs to be done *with* Indigenous tribes.

It was the realization of how history has impacted Indigenous nations and the need for Indigenous voices to be heard that tribal sovereignty and self-governance of these nations were born. Tribal sovereignty and self-governance were granted by the United States government. The government entity, referred to as the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA, 2016), helps to protect tribes that are recognized by the United States government as “possessing certain inherent rights of self-government (i.e., tribal sovereignty) and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, services, and protections because of their special relationship with the United States” (para. 66). There are approximately 566 federally-recognized American Indian and Alaska Native tribes in the United States (BIA, 2016). Later in the methodology chapter, I will go into greater detail about how tribal sovereignty and self-governance influence research working with Indigenous populations. This is an important distinction to make, because it explains the need for tribal consultation and how to work with Indigenous communities when conducting research.

### **Problem Statement**

Fiola (2015) states that “Anishinaabe Elders believe that each of the fires (or eras of time) that were predicted has come to pass and that we are currently in the time of the Seventh Fire” (p. 2). “The Seventh Fire speaks of the importance of the work of *Oshikibimaadiziig* (New People) as contributing to the potential for the eighth (and final) Fire,” which is an eternal fire



that indicates the unity of all humans (Fiola, 2015, p. 3). The Seventh Fire leads us to choose between two different paths—one that will lead us to destruction, while the other grants us salvation. The "two roads" that face the light skinned race are the roads to technology and to spiritualism. As I reflect on the two roads, I imagine what my childhood was like without computers in every home and a smartphone stuck to my hand. I was much more active. I was much healthier. I did not have the technology available to me back then; I relied on the land for my entertainment. Could our dependence on modern technology be affecting our health?

The prophet of the Fourth Fire spoke of a time when two nations will join together to become a stronger, mightier nation. Although it has been proven through our traumatic history that the mighty nation referred to by Fourth Fire has never been formed, it is believed that together, we might be able to deliver our society from the road to destruction. In order to accomplish this task, we must take the road that represents two clashing world views coming together to form a mighty nation. This brotherhood is having respect for all living things and the different views that we share. It is coexisting with each other that represents brotherhood, respect, and solidarity. Can we be the people of the Seventh Fire that save us from destruction?

In order to fully accomplish taking the road to form the mighty nation referred to in the prophecy, we must first rediscover the traditions of our Indigenous ancestors. We must then decolonize in order for this rediscovery to take place. Yahn (2014) defines colonization as “to take over, to invade and conquer, to impose and establish the culture, the values, the social, political and economic systems of the conquering colonizer by eradicating the civilizations of those conquered and colonized” (para. 3). She further defines “decolonization” as “the process of undoing colonization” (para. 19). The first step toward conducting research and keeping our identities as Indigenous scholars is the empowerment of decolonization. It is the act of

decolonizing our intellectual space and property and keeping them as our own. Red Pedagogy and decolonization attempt to heal the traumas of our past. The domination of Western philosophies is spread throughout many paradigms (including research and scholarship). It is essential that Indigenous research and scholarship begin with an understanding of one's cultural identity—it is only then that we can challenge the dominant views in research and scholarship, which will allow us to decolonize and reimagine ourselves in a colonized world.

### **Purpose of Study**

Before discussing the purpose of this study, I will define culture and then discuss how culture influences the purpose of this study. Kumar & Janz (2010) discuss that culture does not have a single agreed upon definition. It refers to a person's activities and behaviors, as well as influences from our heritage and societal norms. It touches many parts of lives, which includes the food, clothing, individual and family activities, music, and spirituality. Using this Kumar & Janz (2010) as a springboard, I personally identify with multiple influences in my life. I am a proud Indigenous woman, but I also recognize myself as someone with French-Canadian roots as well. I find pride in the multiple roots of my background, as I find the beauty in my multiple cultures coming together to co-exist with one another. It is these views that allow me to identify as someone with more than one culture, so I describe myself as a multi-ethnic Indigenous woman.

Culture is considered to be something that is carried across generations to help meet basic needs and survival of people (Kumar & Janz, 2010). Despite many definitions of culture, most definitions still fail to recognize that “for many [Indigenous] individuals, culture cannot be defined on its own, as a separate entity, but instead culture is life itself—an all-encompassing concept. As a result, culture may have an impact on [Indigenous] individuals” (p. 63). If culture

is considered to be something to meet the basic needs of survival of Indigenous people, then one can suggest that it is critical in relation to one's health. It contributes to life and the survival of our people.

The overall purpose of this study was to examine multi-ethnic educational models in Indigenous health education. I wanted to know how this approach works—in particular with a multicultural tribe. The personal driving force that helped to contribute to my study and the research questions is my own personal experiences as a multicultural student and educator. If I talked about jigging and fiddle music, I was not “Indigenous enough”—but if I talked in Michif (our tribe's word to describe Metis), my language was not truly French. I could not find my place in academia, because I was not more one identity than the other. Each part of my cultural background contributed to who I am. Was it okay to be multi-ethnic? It was this self-reflecting question that inspired this study.

In order to research and analyze these topics, I use a series of theoretical frameworks (Post-colonial theory, Critical Race Theory, and TribalCrit) that help me to better understand how history has influenced Indigenous health in the present day. The data helped me to analyze these questions through the process of collecting interviews with Indigenous elders and educators presenting in a culture class hosted by a summer camp. The multi-ethnic elders chosen for interviews were based solely on their role as an employee or guest lecturer for the summer camp. The summer camp chosen for this study builds on the idea of the students being multi-ethnic and/or exposing them to local cultures other than just their own in hopes to build mutual cultural respect and a sense of community.

## Theoretical Framework

In this section, I introduce the theories chosen for my analysis, as well as the current research studies on my topic, that are relevant to my study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) and TribalCrit are the driving force of my analysis of research and serve as the basis for all conceptual frameworks regarding this study because of their applications to forced colonization, which has ultimately affected the health outcomes of Indigenous populations. Critical race theory is a theoretical framework that “offers researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers a race-conscious approach to understanding educational inequality and structural racism to find solutions that lead to greater justice” (Price, 2018, p. 1). By using this approach, researchers attempt to “interrogate policies and practices that are taken for granted to uncover the overt and covert ways that racist ideologies, structures, and institutions create and maintain racial inequality” (Price, 2018, p. 1). Policies such as the Indian Removal Act (1830), Dawes Allotment (1887), and the Termination Acts (1953) that have contributed to the prohibition of Indigenous customs, ceremonies, and languages are those that must be interrogated. It was these policies’ role in the prohibition of culture, which is thought to contribute to historical trauma and the declining health outcomes of Indigenous populations (Edwards & Patchell, 2009).

CRT and TribalCrit expose both governmental and cultural systemic oppression and the consequent need for social justice. This critical exposure reveals both the “truth about injustices perpetuated against Indigenous People [which have been] largely denied in the United States” and the need for “truth-telling [as] an important strategy for decolonization” (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 7). According to Brayboy (2005), “TribalCrit has its roots in Critical Race Theory, Anthropology, Political/Legal Theory, Political Science, American Indian Literatures, Education, and American Indian Studies” (p. 425). Furthermore, he states, “TribalCrit emerges

from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically—and geographically—located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). Due to their applications to expose inconsistencies and the need for social justice among Indigenous populations, Critical Race Theory and TribalCrit were selected in order to explore history and its policies that affected Indigenous populations. Since history and historical trauma have a direct correlation to the health status of Indigenous populations, it was essential to use these applications in this study. In addition, Critical Race Theory and TribalCrit help argue the need for culturally sensitive approaches (culturally sustaining pedagogy) as necessary in education. Culturally sustaining pedagogy is not only an effective teaching tool, but in fact helps the culture to survive from generation to generation.

Specifically, TribalCrit assists researchers by making the connections between historical trauma and the current status of Indigenous health, which has led to the Indigenous population’s health issues in our present day. Indigenous people are continuing to see the effects of colonization in present day society. Brayboy (2005) states, “the colonization has been so complete that even many American Indians fail to recognize that we are taking up colonialist ideas when we fail to express ourselves in ways that may challenge dominant society’s ideas about who and what we are supposed to be, how we are supposed to behave, and what we are supposed to be within the larger population” (p. 431). I must sadly admit that there are times that I have been guilty of this unknowing adoption of colonialist ideas. For example, many women my age in society cut their hair on a regular basis—it is almost expected to be “trimmed and proper.” However, my father (who had long hair most of his life) reminded me that we “should only cut our hair in mourning—it was the Native way.” I had forgotten this lesson, while conforming to the expectation within the dominant whitestream culture that I would get my hair

done regularly. After he passed, I vowed to never cut my hair, except in mourning in honor of my dad and his lessons. It was the “Native way” to show I was in mourning. It was my family’s way of challenging what was expected of us in modern society. Brayboy’s (2005) words rang true to me, as I had previously failed to challenge the dominant society’s ideas of what I was expected to do. I had to remind myself that I had to break away from the colonist ideas that I was subconsciously adopting.

In response to Brayboy’s (2005) research, if American Indians are challenging society’s ideas of what an Indigenous person is supposed to look like within the larger population, then how would this look in education? Whatever form the educational process of formal education takes with Indigenous students, researchers [Brayboy (2005), Daza & Tuck (2014)] suggest the importance of decolonizing education to best fit the needs of Indigenous students. According to Pewewardy (1992), educators should concentrate on the process of “inserting education into the culture, rather than inserting culture into the education” (p. 5). Culture is the priority, if education is introduced into the culture, then it is valued. If education is valued, then students learn more effectively. According to Paris (2012) to maintain our increasingly multi-ethnic and multilingual society, we must call upon culturally-sustaining pedagogy, because neither the term culturally-responsive or culturally-relevant go far enough. This is in relation to the idea that both terms are in fact unidirectional and do not guarantee support for a multiculturalism and multilingualism among students (Paris, 2012). If we combine both Pewewardy’s (1992) and Paris’ (2012) viewpoints on cultural education, we will view cultural education as something that is influenced by multiple factors. Cultural education is not something that should be considered in the final steps of lesson planning—we need to take this methodology further by considering how culture should influence the lesson itself. It should be treated as a priority rather than just

an optional curriculum. (i.e., how can my knowledge of my student's background influence the decisions that I am making in my classroom (selected readings, field trips, class projects)?)

Taking control over the curriculum to prioritize culture is an act of decolonization.

When we examine the decolonization definition, along with why it is important, we must also look at how decolonization may affect our health. Long ago, Indigenous people did not know the diseases they suffer from today. Indigenous communities were believed to be free of both chronic and infectious diseases before they had any contact with Europeans (Fialkowski, Okoror, & Boushey, 2012). In the present day, health statistics describing Indigenous people are distressing compared to the rest of the general U.S. population (Adamsen, 2018).

Decolonization is essentially using culture as medicine (Adamsen, 2018). As previously mentioned before, culture as medicine is an Indigenous way of looking at healing. Culture is not a singular term, as it relates to the pluralistic society in which we currently live (there are so many identities in our present day). Culture as medicine refers to healing that embraces Indigenous Peoples' culture, practices, and identity—which is why it is so important. It is taking the teachings of Indigenous people and the factors of what makes their identities in order to heal from past traumas. Decolonization assists in breaking away from Western paradigms, values, and teachings for Native people who need to keep their identity close, as well as have a positive effect on health status. Giron (2016) goes on to say that “a person with a decolonized mind accepts their past, loves their present and creates their future, regardless of what stands in their way” (para. 4). By using culture as medicine, it could improve overall Indigenous health. This leads us to believe that decolonizing Indigenous education and taking back Indigenous tradition is essential to our survival, not only as an Indigenous nation—but as individuals. Decolonizing education is an important step in helping future generations heal from historical trauma, which is

why it is important to study how certain educational programs are approaching this new way of thinking in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

As I began my research, it was important to determine how I would join the conversation of existing research. According to Giroux (2016), “Metis people become united as a healthy, vibrant community (Simpson 2011: 12-13), [publicly] reasserting themselves as Metis, an action that has important, political consequences: it is not a spectacle for the benefit of the non-Indigenous outside, nor is its relationship with mainstream, settler culture crucial to its existence; rather, it is a space to work towards rebuilding the independence of the Metis Nation” (p. 82). LeClair (2008) explains that in order to make sense of our own [Metis] inquiries we must first understand our own identities, “we must determine our own identity within the parameters established by us,” (Nyoongah qtd. In D’Cruz, par. 5) in turn, rebuilding the independence of our identity as a Metis Nation. When looking at Metis research—most (if not all) articles were Canadian based. I personally self-identify (Metis is referred to as ‘Michif’ by my tribe), but there were not any articles that I could find that were based on a U.S. population of Metis.

After visiting with friends and family members, I found that there were cultural tensions among tribes in the United States, as we are told how to identify in order to be federally recognized. This is a big factor in how we identify, because in order to receive funding and government benefits—we have to be federally recognized. Blood quantum even played a role in how people identify—as it determined whether you could be recognized as Indigenous by the federal government. We had to have a specific amount of Indigenous blood running through our veins to be considered Indigenous in the eyes of the federal government, which is just one



example of present day colonialism. In addition to issues of federal recognition of tribal identity, I identified a gap in research that examines multi-ethnic Indigenous cultures.

Once I determined the gap in research, I thought back to my own experiences in academia and the belief that I was not “Indigenous enough.” Using what I learned from my own experiences, I began this study with a couple of questions in mind: Can we truly decolonize education if we are multi-ethnic? Do I have to reject my French-Canadian heritage to decolonize and go back to my roots? Given that my own experiences were at the forefront of this study, I ran with the notion of using my own tribe and a program with which I was already familiar. I began working with Belcourt Youth Activities Program or BYAP when I was 16 years old. The Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP) is a program in coalition with the National Youth Sport Program since 2004. It is a four-week summer camp located at the Turtle Mountain Community High School, located on the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation. The camp is open to area youth ranging between the ages of 6-18. BYAP promotes healthy lifestyle choices for area youth urging them to take part in physical fitness and healthy choices, such as abstaining from drug and alcohol usage. This summer program was selected due to its curriculum offering its own culture program that is considered to have influences on student health outcomes. I remember enjoying the cultural aspects of the program, as it recognized multiple local cultures. This was different from the cultural education programs that I grew up with in grade school, as many of the programs that I grew up with only acknowledged Ojibway/Anishinaabe culture.

The BYAP Culture is a class that is offered bi-weekly (due to the large size of the classes) to students along with sports programming in hopes to promote healthier lifestyles. The culture class in the BYAP program invites area lecturers to come present to the students about different aspects of the Metis culture, this includes language, history, nature walks, hunting,

fishing, music, dance, and nutrition. This program is unique in its offering given that it is being used specifically to promote health among Indigenous youth, but also in its use with multi-ethnic educators and practices of using a multicultural curriculum (in this case, Metis). Given this unique opportunity, I refined my questions into the following: How is culture used as medicine in a Metis youth sports program? How is use of medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators? What health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result of culture used as medicine in the program? Can a multi-ethnic approach to Indigenous culture be used as a tool for decolonization? What can be gained or what is the purpose of taking a multi-ethnic approach to Indigenous culture? I believe these questions will help me learn about my own identity as a Metis/Michif woman in hopes that I can finally determine my own place in academia.

To answer these research questions, this study will examine the relationship of cultural practices and values with their influence on health status within a specific multi-ethnic Indigenous community (the Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation). The Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP) was described by its administrator as using culturally responsive teaching strategies to approach health and wellness education. Culturally responsive teaching can also empower both the practitioner and the child, as well as inform them of their cultural heritage (Gay, 2000). The goal of my study is to report on the educators' perceptions of their approach to education and determine if it is believed to have a positive effect on learners' health status. The researcher has personal ties to the specific reservation being studied (Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, ND) as an enrolled tribal member. I chose this reservation, since I am aware of the many cultural identities present in the area.

Before beginning the study, it was important to understand how Indigenous narrative is viewed in research. Gunn Allen (1991) uses a metaphor that describes oral narratives from an

Indigenous lens: oral tradition is a “living body” that has a continuous flux that allows it to “change” itself to real-life situations in people’s lives (p. 2110). This continuous change is also believed to be the narrative’s strength, as well as its greatest weakness. When reality is situated in a racist, prejudiced, and classist system, the oral narratives will reflect those values. As a result, people’s minds will unconsciously accept those same values and not even notice the shift. What this means is that when exposed to the outside world, these oral narratives can evolve to represent a set of values that is not truly representative of the Indigenous values that the oral narrative originally set out to convey. Gunn Allen (1991) writes from both an Indigenous and feminist approach to theory and makes a very powerful argument about how the Indigenous stories need to be handled with extreme and deliberate care by the listener.

Context is key in understanding meaning in Indigenous interviews, which is why I will be examining the interviews using the entire context of a statement, rather than just certain words. This is an important distinction when approaching interview, as Indigenous research methodology allows our participants to be comfortable enough to share and acknowledge their narrative as something that belongs to them, rather than the institution. This method can be used to empower the practitioner to tell their own story, since oral narratives are often believed to be a tool for “survival.” When Indigenous Peoples attempt to decolonize, they take some of that identity back as an attempt to protect themselves, their culture, and their people. Coding your data can “disturb” the original data and can possibly change the source in different fundamental ways unconsciously. Examining quotes within context will be done in my data analysis in hopes to keep the narrative in its intended form, as Gunn Allen (1991) addresses narrative itself can serve as a tool for survival.

Survival is a key theme in my preliminary research in this study. Indigenous history continues to impact Indigenous populations negatively in relation to their health due to historical trauma. Historical trauma was influenced largely by the idea of stripping away the culture from Indigenous populations, which has led to negative effects on health status. Culture as medicine addresses the need for healing from historical trauma using our traditional ways of life. In using Indigenous lessons and traditions, we can take the road of spirituality help to heal ourselves from the traumas of our past in order to move forward; thus, ensuring our survival as Indigenous people.

## CHAPTER II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To best determine how culture as medicine can be used to help heal Indigenous populations, the role of survival and identity were explored in this literature review. I examined different sources to evaluate the relationship between Indigenous history and Indigenous health status. This relationship helped to build an argument for the need for social justice in Indigenous education, which calls for decolonization and culturally sustaining pedagogy. In turn, this will assist me in developing a theory in which the two can work together harmoniously to promote Indigenous health status. This literature review will be done through a post-colonial lens in addition to Critical Race Theory. The organization of this literature review ties together some of the key components of my argument for the need of culturally sustaining education for Indigenous populations. It begins with the effects of forced colonization on Indigenous populations, which explains the need for decolonization efforts of Indigenous people. This is later reinforced through the explanation of how Indigenous populations view their own health status in present day. This history and background help to lay the groundwork of explaining why it is important to use culturally responsive and sustaining methods of education with this population. I also provide examples of how using “culture as medicine” and decolonization improves the health of Indigenous populations—in this case, Metis populations.

It is first important to view how history has impacted the lives of the Indigenous people of North America. During the forced colonization of Indigenous people, we have seen the eradication of Indigenous practices, language, and customs by its colonizers. Furthermore, formal education in the past for Indigenous populations stemmed from Pratt’s belief of “Kill the Indian, Save the Man” (Grayshield et al., 2015, p. 301). Captain Richard Henry Pratt led Congress’ great “Indian” education experiment. Pratt did not believe in the extermination of

Indigenous people as many of his colleagues, but rather fought for assimilation of Indigenous People. It was his ideas in which the Indian Boarding Schools were born. This was a devastating era in which Indigenous children were taken far away from their homes in order to suppress their Indigenous traditions and identity to train them for subservient positions thought to benefit the dominant society (Edwards & Patchell, 2009). Indigenous People were thought of nothing more than achieving the lower classes of American society, Pratt believed.

### **Effects of Forced Colonization**

As stated in the previous chapter, historical trauma is thought to be a cause in the declining health status of Indigenous populations. It is important to understand the history of Indigenous people in order to recognize the cause of historical trauma in Indigenous populations—more specifically, how the forced assimilation and eradication of traditional practices caused long-term effects on the health of Indigenous people. Long ago, Indigenous people did not know disease. This is considered to be something that was introduced to Indigenous populations by its colonizers. After referring to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Indian Health Service (IHS), McLaughlin (2010) states that prior to colonization, all chronic health conditions (including diabetes) were practically nonexistent in Indian country. Indigenous history notes that when the early settlers tried to colonize Indigenous peoples, they established their domination over the culture. Prior to their forced colonization, Indigenous people had deep relationships with their culture. When this relationship was disrupted, it was believed that their balance and harmony as Indigenous people was negatively affected (Patchell & Edwards, 2014). These past traumas have led to the historical trauma of the Indigenous population.

Historical trauma is believed to still affect the current population of Indigenous people throughout the world. Historical trauma refers to “community massacres, genocidal policies, pandemics from the introduction of new diseases, forced relocation, forced removal of children through Indian boarding school policies, and prohibition of spiritual and cultural practices,” over many generations (Evans-Campbell, 2008, p. 316). Warne and Lajimodiere (2015) state that by the 19th century, populations of Indigenous people were reduced by 95%. This significant decrease in population could be attributed to infectious disease, genocide, warfare, slavery, and forced colonization of Indigenous people (Warne & Lajimodiere, 2015). It is believed that the cultural trauma endured by the Indigenous population also led to their decline in health status. Intergenerational transmission of trauma is a complex phenomenon that is, “from person to person or within communities and give us little insight into the relationship between historical and contemporary trauma responses in American Indian & Alaska Indigenous communities” (p. 316).

The health and social well-being of Indigenous people continues to be affected by the injustices that were perpetrated upon them by forced colonization. Historical trauma is something that the population is still trying to heal from and affects Indigenous people still to the current day—Historical trauma has led to major consequences on the general health status of this population. Social inequalities that have contributed to the social and individual ills of the Indigenous populations have referenced historical trauma as a source. Kirmayer et al. (2014) contend that historical trauma has been on the rise as a “trope” to describe the long-term impact of colonization for the continuing disparities and serves as a rationale for focusing on social, cultural, and psychological interventions (Hatala et al., 2016).

In recent years, there have been several studies (Chae and Walters, 2009; Evans-Campbell, 2008) that have proved that historical trauma and inadequate health care access are associated with the higher rates of health disparities endured by Indigenous people throughout North America (Walters, et al., 2011). Since the colonization of Indigenous populations, the health status of Indigenous people has been disproportionately affected due to the exposure of infectious diseases and mass genocide. As mentioned in the research of Warne & Lajimodiere (2015), forced colonization of Indigenous people had multiple factors, which included the abolishment of their cultural practices, language, as well as other aspects of their traditional knowledge systems and education. Walters et al. (2011) has shown a causal link between forced colonization and the general decrease in health status among Indigenous populations. In addition, the forced colonization of Indigenous people eradicated cultural practice and knowledge from education, which is directly linked to the historical trauma of these populations (Grayshield et al, 2015). An example of the continued colonization is making U.S. and World History classes a requirement in schools but making Indigenous History an elective course.

When the balance of Indigenous people was disrupted by colonization and cultural trauma, it was believed that the shift impacted Indigenous health outcomes. Contemporary health research conducted with Indigenous populations emphasizes the connections between colonization and present-day health disparities when compared to non-Indigenous populations (Hatala, Desjardins, & Bombay, 2016). Indigenous people have higher mortality rates when compared to the U.S. general population for heart disease, chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes mellitus, and chronic lower respiratory diseases just to name a few (Adamsen, 2018). Adamsen (2018) refers to information she gained from the Indian Health Service (2014) and Braun & LaCounte (2015), Indigenous populations have higher statistics in the following health



categories: chronic liver disease and cirrhosis (368 percent higher), diabetes mellitus (177 percent higher), unintentional injuries (138 percent higher), assault and homicide (82 percent higher), intentional self-harm and suicide (65 percent higher), and chronic lower respiratory diseases (59 percent higher) (p. 1). This infestation of communicable diseases is considered to be something that was introduced to Indigenous populations by its colonizers. These health disparities in Indigenous populations referenced here are concerning compared to non-Indigenous populations, as they often relate to lower life expectancy rates among different populations.

In order to regain Indigenous health, we must find balance. The idea of resilience among Indigenous populations is strengthened by the importance of having connections between oneself, one's culture, and one's community (Hatala et al., 2016). It is important to consider a person's overall well-being, which demands "a balance among physical, cultural, emotional, and spiritual domains" (Hatala et al., 2016, p. 1914). When I was a child, I used to think that health was just physical. However, as I grew older, I have come to realize what Hatala et al. (2016) are referencing in relation to health. Health goes further than just physical well-being. We must all have a healthy mind, body, and soul in order to maintain our health, it all comes full circle. It is all related. It is these views that I believe Hatala et al. (2016) is referencing when discussing the need for "balance." Hatala et al. (2016) specifically mention cultural health as a health domain, which means that in order to heal ourselves as Indigenous people, we must have a close relationship with our culture.

The balance that is referenced in Hatala's (2016) quote also relates to Adamsen's (2018) conceptualization that Indigenous health relates back to the medicine wheel or "Sacred Hoop." The medicine wheel is the belief that there are four equal realms. These realms include mental,

physical, emotional, and spiritual—which relate to Indigenous health areas. Using the conceptualization of the medicine wheel reflects the idea that if any of the health areas shift, there is an imbalance and can affect health. Hatala et al. (2016) further support this concept with their reference for a need for balance among four separate domains in order to be resilient. One can think of the Medicine Wheel as a living body when it is used in relation to Indigenous health and wellness. We must keep a balance to each realm in order to remain healthy. If we ignore our health in one area, we cause a shift in our body that affects our healthy balance. In order to remain a healthy individual, we must realize that our spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical health are equally important to one another. If we ignore one realm, we cause a shift in our own health status (i.e., Someone who is physically healthy, but not mentally healthy. A shift in either realm can be just as deadly, as all four realms are of equal importance).

Medicine wheels have often been used when approaching Indigenous frameworks for health and medicine. The Medicine Wheel or “Sacred Hoop” “is an Indigenous metaphor with many variants used by some tribal nations to impart teachings and lifeways (Guzman et al., 2020). Given the Medicine Wheel’s uses in both education and health, this allows one to believe that it can be used to help analyze the effectiveness in a health and wellness program. “This [Medicine Wheel] model has been utilized within the field of medicine as a healing framework” (Guzman et al., 2020, p.2). This framework is usually found in relation to Indigenous health, which calls for a balance among all four realms. Guzman et al. (2020) recently carried out their own program evaluation using this model as a decolonized approach to program evaluation.

### **Theoretical Applications**

As I continued to determine methodological framework in order to conduct my own study, I had to stay true to my own identity as a multi-ethnic Indigenous person. Postcolonialism

first fit my approach to research, as it examines the western standards of cultural, political, psychological expectations of the world. In Abdul-Jabbar's (2019) work, he discusses the African diaspora, specifically referring to non-Western cultures infiltrating the colonial center. In addition to this discussion, he also talks about post-colonialism in relation to Indigenous cultures, the 'so-called civilizing mission' that caused a flow of cultural dispersion. Post-colonialism allows us to analyze through a double consciousness: how do multiple types of identities interact with each other? (Abdul-Jabbar, 2019). This double-consciousness is important to recognize in my dissertation, because I am one who has been directly affected by the "cultural dispersion" by being a mixed blooded Indigenous person.

In this dissertation, the double consciousness examined would be Indigenous and French-Canadian identities. As a researcher, I will have my own double consciousness. In Grande's (2003) article "Red Pedagogy: The Un-Methodology" she describes a "Sophie's Choice" moment that an Indigenous researcher must face when approaching research (p. 234). Grande (2003) describes how an Indigenous scholar is faced with the issue of maintaining his/her identity as an Indigenous person, or the practice of scholarly research. It is the idea that we must choose between our culture and the research paradigms of the dominant culture—it seems that we cannot have both to be taken seriously in our research. However, this choice is incompatible with our research, as it is our Indigenous knowledge systems that inform our inquiries. So why do we, as Indigenous researchers, have to choose? It is further oppressing us to "think" as a colonized group.

Grande is known as one of the leading Indigenous researchers of Red Pedagogy in academia today, as she wrote the book on Red Pedagogy often referred to by many Indigenous researchers. In Grande's (2008) book about Red Pedagogy, she continues her discussion of the

historical “dehumanization” of Indigenous people (p. 234). Red pedagogical approaches ask that as researchers, we examine Indigenous communities and policies as our own, and we take seriously the perception that we are acting as revolutionary agents rather than as trying to understand who we are as Indigenous Peoples. Acting as a revolutionary agent in Indigenous research asks us to break away from the dominant group in order to maintain our identities as both Indigenous people and researchers by allowing us to decolonize our approaches to research. Researchers (such as Chilisa (2012), Daza & Tuck (2014), Grande (2008), and Wilson (2008)) offer alternative decolonized methodologies when approaching Indigenous research that uses Indigenous knowledge systems to allow us to continue to identify as both scholars and Indigenous people. I plan on maintaining a double consciousness that allows me to maintain both identities as a scholar and Indigenous woman. By being forced to choose between identities, I would be sacrificing one identity for another.

In addition to Post-colonial Theory using the double-consciousness, I will also be using Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a relevant theoretical framework for this study, because Critical Race Theory is an approach that “offers researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers a race-conscious approach to understanding educational inequality and structural racism to find solutions that lead to greater justice” (Price, 2018, p. 1). This study is examining the assimilation and the inequity of health disparities among Indigenous populations, so it makes sense to include CRT to examine issues that call for social justice in education. By using this approach, researchers attempt to “interrogate policies and practices that are taken for granted to uncover the overt and covert ways that racist ideologies, structures, and institutions create and maintain racial inequality” (Price, 2018, p. 1). Using CRT allows researchers to examine how history has influenced current policy and practice in order to help determine future steps toward social

justice, which makes it necessary when approaching research that is highly influenced by historical trauma.

The framework of Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) was developed as a specific CRT application in order to study for the unique relationship of Indigenous to the laws and policies of the U.S government. Currently, TribalCrit functions to “expose the inconsistencies in structural systems and institutions [to] make the situation better for Indigenous students” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 441). It helps to expose the current system’s shortcomings in education in relationship to Indigenous education. TribalCrit “provides a way to address the complicated relationship between American Indians and the United States federal government and begin to make sense of American Indians’ liminality as both racial and legal/political groups and individuals” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427). This relationship between Indigenous populations and the U.S. government needs to be examined, as it is directly correlated with historical trauma and the current status of Indigenous health outcomes. It is the complicated relationship of our past that has led us to our current state of crisis. According to Grande (2000), pairing Critical Race Theory and its subsets (in this case, TribalCrit) would provide “a potential frame from which to construct a space for American Indian intellectualism” (p. 6). Again, allowing us to maintain a double consciousness by not forcing us to choose between being a scholar or an Indigenous person. Post-colonial, CRT, and TribalCrit theories expose both governmental and cultural systemic oppression and the consequent need for social justice. This study will attempt to expose the relationship between health status of Indigenous people and culturally sustaining teaching practices.

It was essential to pair Critical Race Theory and TribalCrit together after reflecting on some Indigenous researchers views regarding post-colonialism, because it allowed me to

examine the relationships which led to historical trauma. Smith (1999) explains that, “For Indigenous peoples the beginning of a new century is really a continuation of a struggle that began five centuries ago. While the language of imperialism and colonialism has changed, the sites of struggle still remain” (p. 104). Some Indigenous researchers (like Smith) believe that there is nothing “post” about colonialization, the struggle from colonization will continue to be there as we remain colonized. Smith is simply pointing out that Indigenous nations are continuing to see the aftereffects of colonialism and assimilation of Indigenous people today. Indigenous people continuing to combat declining health outcomes is just one struggle as a result of the historical trauma brought on our ancestors centuries ago. We have seen a change in colonization over the years, as many Indigenous nations are reclaiming their traditions, but it does not necessarily mean that we are in a post-colonial period—the dominant culture still reigns supreme. This means that there is nothing ‘post’ about our condition at all. According to Daza & Tuck (2014) post-colonial is often treated as a synonym in critical theory applications:

perhaps because post-colonial, anticolonial, decolonizing, and Indigenous issues in education have primarily been engaged as a subset or subfield of critical, antioppressive, ethnic, and multicultural education, they are often treated as different words for the same thing, as synonyms. In convening this issue, we grouped these terms together, but we also question the value of this grouping. What are the tensions between postcolonial projects and Indigenous projects? (p. 309).

Thus, we start to see the concept of postpluscolonial projects (which allows us to approach questions with the idea that there is nothing post about our colonization), which critiques its own investments in colonialism and the dispossession of Indigenous land and life, which is an example of cultural hybridity. According to Kraidy (2002), cultural hybridity is

“hybridity as a clear product of...global and local interactions,” such as those of the Metis/Michif community whose identities are both Indigenous and European (p. 317). Additionally, understanding cultural hybridity “as a practice marks the recognition that transcultural relations are complex, processual, and dynamic” (p.317). This helped to shape the approach that I took with post-colonialism in mind. There’s nothing post about colonialism and this is the tension between post-colonial and Indigenous projects that is referred to in the quote of Daza and Tuck (2014). According to Paperson (2010) postpluscolonial projects examine the latest development on colonialism, or “the noun *post* is a place where an activity or duty is carried out. Postpluscolonial then refers to the place, people, or cultural arena where colonial activity or duties are carried out” (p. 8). When approaching my research, I needed to acknowledge this new postpluscolonialism approach to my project. I needed to acknowledge what other researchers before me determined—that there is nothing post about our state. Postpluscolonial is an alternative approach to the questions in academia that hope to serve both justice and ethics when dealing with race.

Like Paperson, Daza and Tuck (2014) also state that Indigenous scholars have expressed their dissatisfaction with postcolonial projects, because there is nothing “post” about it—post means after and we are continuing to see the effects of colonization today. We see this in mainstream education with the limited amount of people who speak and understand our traditional languages, and land ownership laws just to name a couple. Tribal lands are often held in trust, which refers to the practice of the federal government serving as trustee of tribal lands. This means that tribes do not have the authority to sell the tribal land without the consent of the federal government. This is just one way that the federal government still maintains control over Indigenous populations and lands. Daza and Tuck (2014) refer to Patel’s notes by

quoting “coloniality, because of its pervasiveness, implicates everyone through its ongoing structure of people, land, and well-being” ...it is important to remember how our decolonizing work, identities, and political imaginations are more than just oppositional stances” (Daza & Tuck, 2014, p. 310-311). Indigenous people are, in fact, fighting for cultural survival. By acknowledging that we are not in a post state of colonialism, I am able to determine why it is so important to take decolonized approaches in my research. Decolonized approaches in my research and education are the only way that I will not have a Sophie’s Choice moment in which I have to choose between my identity as an Indigenous woman or as a scholar.

### **The Importance of Decolonization**

The Indigenous knowledge system, shaped by resistance and survival, centers around one key concept in research and culture: decolonization. There are many definitions of decolonization. Given that my research is largely influenced by my Indigenous culture and colonialism, I chose Simpson’s definition of the term. Simpson (2011) defines “decolonization” as “to present Indigenous culture and knowledge ‘with the goal of lifting the burden of colonialism by visioning new realities” (p. 34). Moreover, decolonization acts as an overall conceptual framework for researchers working with Indigenous populations. Both groundbreaking theorists and practicing Indigenous researchers emphasize decolonization and its importance when conducting research with Indigenous people.

In order to “vision new realities,” we must first recognize the truth from our past. Considering the past oppression of Indigenous people, the historical context confirms that Indigenous were stripped of their identities by colonization. Truth-telling becomes more important as a tool for decolonization. There is a need to tell the “truth about injustices perpetuated against Indigenous People [which have been] largely denied in the United States”



and the need for “truth-telling [is] an important strategy for decolonization” (Wilson & Yellow Bird, 2005, p. 7). Indigenous Peoples learn to resist white imperialism by using truth-telling as a tool for the survival of their people. By telling the real version of Indigenous history, Indigenous people can use truth-telling to restore their humanity and protect their culture.

It is important for researchers who study and work with Indigenous Peoples to consider the historical underpinnings that call for red pedagogy and decolonization. Grande (2000) explains that a “new” red pedagogy calls for “American Indian peoples and scholars to engage in critical exchange and educational theory, to work hard at redefining the relationship between the academy and tribal America, between theoretical work and revolutionary struggle, and to infuse and further complicate the questions of liberty, democracy, and equity with Indigenous theories grounded in the Earth and its knowledge” (p. 16). Grande is calling for Indigenous researchers to serve as revolutionary agents in academia. In order to do this, we must pave our own way through the academy and scholarship in order to stay true to who we are as Indigenous researchers by using our own traditional knowledge inquiries.

Due to the catastrophic effects of forced colonization of the Indigenous nation, it has become more important now that these populations reclaim their culture, traditions, and Indigenous knowledge systems to vision a “new reality,” one that is free of major health disparities brought on to Indigenous people as a result of their colonization. This is a reality built on both the understanding and healing of historical trauma of Indigenous populations.

The healing of Indigenous people can take place through the education efforts of Indigenous people through the continued passing down of their own cultural practices, knowledge, and histories. Yahn (2014) explains how colonization had influenced eradication of practicing culture and traditional education was banned through the “re-education” efforts of

Indigenous people by the Indian Boarding Schools. The process of taking back our culture and traditional education is our way of empowering ourselves through decolonization efforts.

In order to empower ourselves through decolonization, we must stay informed through our traditional knowledge systems. Chilisa (2012) argues in *Situating Knowledge Systems: Indigenous Research Methodologies* that, “[Indigenous’] ways of seeing reality, ways of knowing, and value systems are informed by their Indigenous knowledge systems and shaped by the struggle to resist and survive the assault on their culture” (p. 13). Indigenous populations are struggling to survive the assault on their culture, which makes the process of decolonization that much more important. Due to these circumstances, all Indigenous education should be approached with utmost cultural sensitivity. The process of decolonization is not only an effort to survive an assault on culture, but also a way to heal from the wrongdoings of historical trauma that were perpetrated on these populations.

Decolonization is considered a way to heal from our past traumas, but there are also researchers that decolonize the term “decolonization,” as it is not a word to describe the process that we came up with ourselves. Moore & Taylor (2014) discuss how even the word “decolonize” is an Anglo-European word that was created to fit into English (a colonized language). Moore and Taylor (2014) state that there is a need to take this word and make it our own by defining it ourselves in terms that we all understand. The word decolonize is often misunderstood and people do not know exactly what it means to decolonize. Moore & Taylor (2014) define this word by stating, “Decolonizing essentially means to start thinking like an Indian” (para. 1). Despite my reservations of using the term “Indian,” I use this quote, because it is an importance step in decolonization by first putting this word to terms that we all understand.

It is a step in the right direction, because more people will essentially understand what it means to decolonize, which can create an agent of change among Indigenous populations.

Moore & Taylor (2014) go into further detail by explaining what it means to actually “think like an Indian.”

when you think like an Indian, you get rid of all the colonial brainwashing, you reclaim tradition and go back to our roots. Reclaiming tradition and decolonizing does not mean that we must give up dressing in jeans and go back to dressing like our ancestors. But it does mean reclaiming our ancestral ways of governance and giving up the systems and procedures we adopted from our colonizers. Decolonizing does not mean we have to go back to living in the woods. But it does mean reviving our ceremonies. It does mean restoring our cultural values. It does mean emphasizing group welfare—the welfare of people in our tribe—and giving up the focus on individual welfare (para. 11).

I think this is an important distinction in their terms. It does not mean that we must give up our grocery stores and start hunting and gathering. It simply means to practice healthy food choices by using our Indigenous diet. We are still decolonizing by using our Indigenous cultural practices to improve individual welfare (in this case, our health).

When we look back at tribal history, we find that when the early settlers tried to colonize Indigenous people, they established their domination over the culture. Decolonization was the act of “Thinking Indian.” It is the style of thinking that embraces Indigenous culture, practices, and identity—which is why it is so important. It assists in the break away from Western paradigms, values, and teachings for Indigenous people who need to keep their identity close. When Indigenous people attempt to decolonize, they take some of that identity back as an attempt to protect themselves, their culture, and their people.

In what ways can Indigenous populations protect themselves? What do they need to protect themselves from? We know that tribal history explains the historical trauma perpetrated on these populations, which has been connected to the decline in health status. The decline in health has also been linked to the prohibition of culture in the past, which supports the ideas of cultural restoration among Indigenous groups. In the next section of this dissertation, I will go over the uses of culturally relevant pedagogy in the hopes to gain a better understanding of how this teaching methodology can serve as a tool for decolonization of Indigenous education. As previously discussed in this literature review, historical trauma and assimilation have a direct effect on health status. Culturally responsive pedagogy can serve to help in the return to cultural participation, which helps heal Indigenous communities from historical trauma.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching is defined as using the cultural knowledge, previous experiences, and strengths of culturally diverse students as a basis for teaching those students more effectively. Culturally relevant teaching stems from the theory that using methods and techniques that are building from a student's interests, values, and strengths helps them to have a more meaningful educational experience by connecting home with school (Gay, 2000). This rings true to me, as I see this every day working with secondary students. If students do not view a classroom assignment or activity as something that pertains to them, they shut down, and they do not want to do it. Students have a need to be able to find the real-world applications to what they are learning, otherwise the activity or assignment holds no value. It is for these reasons that the classroom techniques and approaches must take into consideration the cultural values in order for students to have a meaningful experience with what they are learning.

Indigenous educator Pewewardy (1992) asserts that one of the reasons Indigenous students have trouble in schools is that teachers traditionally have attempted to insert culture into the education, rather than inserting education into the culture. An example of this is prioritizing U.S. history lessons that emphasize the birth of a country, when in fact Indigenous people were here prior. Indigenous history is just a mere footnote in this curriculum, when it should be more of a priority with Indigenous populations because it is history that directly influences our identity as Indigenous people. This is problematic in education, because then it makes culture more of an afterthought than a priority. Marginal programs (such as declining academic performance or lack of student interest) end up being created as a result and do not have the same appeal to Indigenous students. Grande (2004) refers to the quote from the Coolangatta Statement on Indigenous People's Rights in Education (1.5), "The right to be Indigenous is an essential prerequisite to developing and maintaining culturally appropriate and sustainable education for Indigenous peoples" (p. 10). This essentially means that culture should be considered prior to creating Indigenous educational programs; it should not be treated as an afterthought. Culture is a "prerequisite" in creating a sustainable education for Indigenous students.

By using Pewewardy's (1992) ideas of inserting education into the culture, we are piquing student's interests early on and making education valued by the community (not just the individual). As a result of this strategy, it is believed that students are not only interested in what they are learning, they will perform better. According to Gay (2000), a result of using culturally relevant teaching strategies is that students will become more interested and perform better with the material. Gay argues early on in her text that, "it is increasingly a cross-cultural phenomenon, in that teachers are frequently not of the same race, ethnicity, class, and language dominance as their students. This demographic and cultural divide is becoming even more

apparent as the number of individuals [minority teachers] in teacher preparation and active classroom teaching dwindle” (Gay, 2000, p.1). Gay’s book is 20 years old; however, more recently, Beyer (2010) added to this idea by stating, “Although classroom diversity is increasing, teachers still tend to be mainly nondiverse. Yet teachers must be skilled in teaching and helping all students” (p. 114). As the only Indigenous staff member at my current pre-dominantly white institution, I know this cross-cultural phenomenon all too well. I am not part of the same cultural group as many of my colleagues or students, so I felt like I had to learn as I went along. There was a cultural divide in my classroom—and as the teacher, it was my job to fill the gap in order to develop relationships with my students. I needed the skills to adapt as I went along to best fit the needs of my students.

In order to identify the needs of a diverse group of students, you must first identify their strengths. Gay (2000) explains Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in Education as an approach that “teaches to and through [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishments” (p. 26). Culturally responsive teaching methods are important because they teach the whole child. Methods that take the culturally responsive teaching approach help to teach intellectual, emotional, social, and political knowledge that covers a variety of topics by using cultural referents. Culturally responsive teaching referents that affect Indigenous populations may include using specific Indigenous language (which can vary from tribe to tribe), using the understanding of historical occurrences to connect with students, bringing community into the classroom, involving parents/families, and reading stories with characters that the students can relate to. It is considering the specific cultures in the classroom on a daily basis and making informed choices on curriculum, methods, and assessments. Teachers that use these methods have more of a community-based classroom that

helps to give their students a sense of belonging, honor their cultural heritage, and support their individual growth.

In order to be a community-based classroom, teachers must be part of the community themselves. An example of this would be how I approached building relationships with my students at the alternative high school where I currently teach. I am at a pre-dominantly white institution as the only minority teacher. In order to build a relationship with my students and be part of their community, I often tell them the story of my own alternative high school experience. Gay (2003) offers teachers who are interested in the CRT the advice that “teachers must be multicultural themselves before they can effectively and authentically teach students to be multicultural” (p. 4). As a multicultural educator, I really connected with this statement. I looked back to my own education and how culture was incorporated. The culture classes that I enjoyed the most honored both my Indigenous identity, as well as my French-Canadian identity. My teachers recognized that our classroom was multicultural, they identified as multicultural, and they respected the different cultures in the room. One memory of this was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade when my teacher, Mrs. Lorraine Crissler, decided to invite my grandfather and father to the classroom as part of a merger Social Studies and cultural unit of Metis people. My grandfather taught my class and me the basics of the language—this is where I learned that my family was particularly using a language dialect influenced by Cree culture. As a member of a Chippewa tribe, I found this interesting. My dad, who was a musician, rounded off the lesson with Metis fiddle music. We learned about the different songs and my class learned how to dance to it. As someone who was very close to multiple generations in my family, this is a memory of my education that to this day, I hold close to my heart. It was teachers, like Mrs. Crissler, that I held as my role

models of how I wanted to teach my own students—especially given that I knew my classroom would be a melting pot of different cultures and backgrounds at a given time.

Culturally responsive teaching is liberating and transformative for the practitioner, and empowering for the student. Gay (2000) enforces this belief by stating “culturally responsive teachers ... validate, facilitate, liberate and empower ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success” (pp. 43–44). It leads one to believe that as educators, we continue to grow through this pedagogy. We continue to learn from our students to better inform our instruction. Throughout the Gay’s book *Culturally Responsive Teaching* (2000), she identifies six key practices that educators need to implement when teaching a culturally diverse population, which would include Indigenous students:

- Curriculum content: using the history, community/national figures, literature, etc. that particularly identifies with Indigenous People
- Learning context: Understand the students as an ethnic group before conducting your methods. What are their strengths and weaknesses? How can you build from them?
- Classroom climate: Students are more vocal when they feel a sense of belonging. Culturally responsive teaching promotes a classroom climate that has a community-like feeling—like a family.
- Student-teacher relationships: It is important to build a meaningful relationship with your students to best determine their needs and allow them to have a comfortable atmosphere for them to share their perspectives
- Instructional techniques: building on the cultural strengths and preferences of the group to allow them to use their own personal experiences and resources for teaching



and learning purposes (i.e. verbal creativity and storytelling used to help teach writing skills, and/or allowing students to work in a small group)

- Performance assessments: Allow the students to actively be part of the evaluation process (Gay, 2000).

By taking these factors into consideration, an educator can better choose which methods and materials to cover in their classroom that best fits the interests and strengths of the group. As a result, students will have a more meaningful educational experience and will perform better.

The ideas of culturally relevant teaching practice are important, because it is these principles that other cultural teaching practice was built upon. It is also important to note the different factors that influence cultural education. It is easy to just try to place culture into the curriculum, but it is far more than just that method. In order to practice culturally relevant strategies effectively, we must first acknowledge the many aspects that need to be considered for this method to be successful. Culturally relevant pedagogy does not go far enough for Indigenous students, as CRP does not consider that some tribal communities have multiple identities present—which would affect choices in curriculum and creating classroom climate. Multiculturalism is present in today’s society, so there are shortcomings in this strategy. In the next section, I will discuss the implementation of this teaching method in an Indigenous classroom and why it is considered to be an effective method to teach Indigenous students.

### **Culturally Responsive Teaching at Work**

Indigenous educator Cornel Pewewardy (1992), created a magnet school built in Minnesota that used the tenets of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy at the center of the school curriculum and climate. Pewewardy (1992) discusses how Indigenous students must make a

false choice about accomplishing high academic achievement or their cultural identity as an Indigenous person. I remember my first year away at college, I came home to visit for the holidays. I was told by more than one person that I sounded non-Indigenous. Without even realizing it, I had become someone who had subconsciously adopted the Western norms and language of the university. When I came home, my peers noticed the shift. Pewewardy (1992) also goes on to explain how Indigenous education should be in tune with tribal community and practice. Pewewardy (1992) expressed the rationale behind creating a magnet school that used American Indian philosophy and thought, “both the Western and Indigenous methodologies recognize the interrelatedness of the physical, psychological, emotional, social, spiritual, and environmental factors that contribute to the overall quality of a person's life. No part of the mind, body, or environment is truly separate and independent” (Pewewardy, 1992, p. 5). Pewewardy (1992) found that students performed better at the magnet school using the standards and tenets that were set forth by the Culturally Relevant Pedagogy used in the school. Students found the material to be of more value and shared a more meaningful and deeper experience with the lessons.

Another study that supports the theory that culturally responsive methods are effective with Indigenous students was conducted by Godinho, Winkel, Woolley, and Webb in 2014. In this particular study, academic professionals used a literacy intervention strategy in a Northern Territory (Australian) school of an Indigenous student population of 97%. The purpose was to increase student attendance rates, as well as help to boost literacy skills in Indigenous students. The socioeconomic status of the students in the school was very low, at a rating of 581, with 1000 as the average rating. It was also reported that the rate of attendance in the school for students was 53%. The intervention was an attempt to address the student disengagement from

the school by implementing a design that encouraged student to physically learn “on country” through a series of day trips and bush camps within the area. This strategy was an attempt to have an approach that promoted Indigenous knowledge and local development as part of teacher practice and their pedagogical design. The overall goal of the strategy was to increase student attendance and improve the already low gap of reading and writing scores of the Indigenous students by at least half in a period of 10 years (Godinho, et al., 2014).

A bush trip/day trip was designed to allow students to illustrate, paint, speak, and write about Indigenous/local knowledge. It was also encouraged during this time to write only on paper, with a teacher scribing if needed. This later led to a website with the products of implementation to celebrate student creative literacies in the program. Students also gained knowledge of literacy and demonstrated higher levels of engagement during these times because of the interest to communicate what means most to them (their places, their culture, their experiences, and their identity).

During the planning approach to the strategy, the research team identified most with the 8 ways of [Indigenous] learning framework. This framework includes the eight pedagogies of narrative-based learning, visual learning processes, hands-on/reflective techniques, land-based learning, use of symbols/metaphors, indirect/synergistic logic, modelling scaffolded genre mastery, and community connectedness (Godinho, et al., 2014). The strategy took two-way teaching and learning as a method of taking both place and cultural literacy to increase student literacy skills. Fundamentally, the researchers wanted to emphasize the importance of what Apple (2013) refers to as praxis—which is the willingness to intervene.

The team chose to conduct a Pocket Book format with the students for a variety of different reasons, including their portability and feature of allowing students to express

themselves for a wider audience. A Pocket Book format is a scaffolded process that is designed to help support students through the decision-making process of writing, revising, revisiting, and refining a specific portable text, with the intent of publication. Possible book topics and discussions were mapped out using templates that had a series of sentence starters to help with the construction of sentences, captions and labels to enhance student vocabulary and understanding, as well as the incorporation of four themes (animal tracks, bush tucker, first aid, and catch 'n' cook). Students were then divided by groups based on their proficiency of English language. The transition from oral to written text often needed intensive teacher scaffolding. The templates were later switched from the templates to student images and writing to produce four Pocket Books using each theme (Godinho, et al., 2014).

After data were collected through attendance and student assignments, it was later determined that there was an increase in attendance during the days that the students had a day/bush trip, therefore demonstrating the impact of using such a strategy. It was also concluded that the Pocket Book intervention strategy and bush trips were effective in doing so because they allowed students to use their cultural ways of knowing to help expand their literacy experiences. This process made it easier for students to stay engaged and made meaningful content writing that they felt proud of producing after reviewing the Pocket Books. Teachers felt that their students remained engaged, were productive, were proud of their accomplishment, and enhanced their verbal/written skills. The Indigenous community also expressed their appreciation that their culture was used to enhance student learning and provide a basis for student engagement. These results suggest that culturally relevant pedagogy is an effective teaching strategy for teaching Indigenous students.

The overall strength of the Australian study was that of using culturally responsive teaching methods for an Indigenous population. The strategy used lessons that were meaningful to students, so it sparked interest and motivation. Researchers in this case drew ideas from personal experiences and knowledge not only from themselves, but from schoolteachers/administrators, and community members to determine the specific needs of the school and the proper academic intervention method to take. They also followed up with these entities after the intervention to measure the impact to those affected by the strategy. This study is a prime example of how culturally relevant teaching methodology can enhance an Indigenous student's literacy skills by connecting the teaching material to what matters most to them (in this case it would be nature and cultural values). The previous study suggests that oral narrative education is a culturally relevant teaching strategy for Indigenous students that helps to introduce cultural values into their curriculum (Godinho, et al., 2014). However, one component of culturally relevant teaching methodology that is missing is the concept of cultural pluralism—when a student may have multiple cultural backgrounds.

The research of Pewerady (1993) and Godinho et al. (2014) both support the idea that culturally relevant teaching is an effective teaching strategy for teaching Indigenous students. As I look back to my educational experience, I often think of the teacher who tried to be culturally sensitive giving us a lecture about Indian boarding schools. I became extremely emotional listening to the testimonies given by my elders in a short film she had shown to us. I did not know why—it was not until I got older that I even heard the term “historical trauma.” I appreciate that a teacher tried to teach me about an aspect of my background, but I felt like for me to truly connect with the material, she needed to be aware of the trauma that she would be opening up for me. I had experienced emotions that I was not prepared for at the time. For these

reasons, culturally relevant teaching strategies should be informed with taking the historical traumas of all students in mind.

For multicultural Indigenous educators, the use of culturally relevant teaching can support Indigenous populations in surviving the assault on their culture. Education can serve as a tool for decolonization with Indigenous populations. As these two studies demonstrated, the Indigenous communities affected by these teaching strategies expressed their appreciation for the educational systems using their culture as the basis for enhancing student learning and promoting student engagement. Pewewardy's (1992) argument for "inserting education into the culture" can be a tool for decolonization as a method of passing down important cultural lessons and practices. Culture is the first consideration when approaching education with Indigenous students as an attempt to connect with something that often matters most to them—their identity. Therefore, it creates a more meaningful educational experience by connecting home with school (Gay, 2000).

Despite being an effective teaching method for diverse students, culturally relevant pedagogy does not go far enough for Indigenous students. This approach does not guarantee the support for multicultural students, which many Indigenous students would identify with as "mixed bloods." In the next section, I will discuss the teaching methodology of culturally sustaining pedagogy and how it uses culturally responsive pedagogy as its foundation. This is an extension of CRP and serves as a more effective method to teach Indigenous students who identify as multicultural or multiracial.

### **Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive pedagogy is a term that was created in the educational research of Gloria Ladson-Billings (2014). Ladson-Billings has the experience working in urban areas that

consist of high numbers of African American students. She inquired about what was going well with these students, as well as studied the classrooms of teachers that had pedagogical success working with these populations. Culturally relevant pedagogy was an attempt for her to teach newer generations of teaching education students to approach education who would bring an “appreciation to their students’ assets” populated with culturally diverse students (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 74). According to Ladson-Billings, many educational researchers have expanded on her work. Ladson-Billings expressed that her term has “taken on a life of its own...totally unrecognizable to me” (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 82). She comments on the extensions that others make on her work on culturally relevant pedagogy—as something that is foundational but needs to be pushed further (Ladson-Billings, 2014). Ladson-Billings agrees with these people. One of those extensions is that of Paris (2012)—which Ladson Billings cites in her article “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy 2.0: a.k.a. The Remix.”

According to Paris (2012), culturally sustaining pedagogy is a term that supports the ever-changing ideas of heritage and community, which thereby aims to also support the value of multi-ethnic and multilingual students in the present and future. In addition to this statement, Paris (2012), also points out that the cultural practices of Indigenous people have “historically been and continue to be the target of deficit approaches; contemporary linguistic, pedagogical, and cultural research has pushed against the tendency of researchers and practitioners to assume unidirectional correspondence between race, ethnicity, language, and cultural ways of being” (p. 94).

However, Paris (2012) argues that to maintain our increasingly multi-ethnic and multilingual society, we must call upon culturally sustaining pedagogy. Paris’ (2012) argument states that neither the term culturally responsive or culturally relevant go far enough. This is in

relation to the idea that both terms are in fact unidirectional and do not guarantee support for a multiculturalism and multilingualism among students. Paris' (2012) essay springboards off these two terms to offer the alternative term of culturally sustaining pedagogy, which requires our pedagogies to go beyond responsive and relevant cultural experiences of students, but also requires teachers to support students in sustaining their cultural and linguistic competence, and also offers access to dominant cultural competence (Paris, 2012).

Culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to foster and sustain cultural pluralism. Paris (2012) states that “a pluralistic society need both the many and the one to be vibrant” (p. 95). Paris (2012) states that teachers must be open to the idea of sustaining students in both their traditional ways, but also in the evolving ways they are living in the current dominant culture (which promotes cultural hybridity). Kraidy (2002) states that “Politically, a critical hybridity theory considers hybridity as a space where intercultural and international communication practices are continuously negotiated in interactions of differential power,” therefore cultural mixture (hybridity) serves as a tool for resistance to dominant culture (p. 317). In addition, monocultural approaches to education have had and continue to have devastating effects on educational access and achievements of students of color (Paris, 2012).

Young, Herring, & Morrison (2017) build from the framework of culturally sustaining pedagogy that Paris lays out in his essay. Young et al. (2017) create the foundation of what a classroom climate using culturally sustaining pedagogy would look like in academia. They move forward by providing suggestions for teachers who wish to use this pedagogical approach in their teaching. Young et al. (2017) suggest the following seven conceptual strategies to use:

- Practice cultural humility- develop a sense of self awareness of your own culture and attitudes. This is a framework that allows the practitioner to reflect on their own



preconceived ideas and biases they may have, which allows educators to reflect on how their own experiences and perceptions impact relationships with others.

- Cultivate inclusive relationships- Inclusive teachers are thought to welcome all students and realize that their classrooms have students with a variety of different abilities, interests, and motivations. They also understand their colleagues as a way to collaborate to extend the learning for every student. “When teachers feel responsible for that relationship, it changes how they teach” (Young et al., 2017, p. 177).
- Plan lessons for everyone- There is no “one size fits all” approach to education. Lessons should move away from this idea to teaching and learning. Inquiry based, project-based, and problem-based learning strategies are all examples of ways that you can plan lessons and instruction for everyone.
- Build teacher capacity- an essential component of inclusive learning environments is built on the idea that all teachers are skilled in teaching all of the students. Specialists and classroom teachers must work together to share instructional resources and methods—in turn, developing stronger skills within the practitioner.
- Use strength-based language- in educational environments, words that are commonly used to describe students that struggle are disorder, deficit, and dysfunction. An alternative to this common practice is using words to describe a student's strengths and gifts. Teachers that participate in this practice allow their students' strengths to learn new material and develop a better relationship with the individual student, as well as their families.
- Develop a growth mindset- This is a decision theory from Carol Dweck (2015) that states that rather than thinking of teaching and learning as “fixed,” educators must

adopt the idea that everyone can get better at learning through practice and developing more experiences with learning. People who have a growth mindset, believe that everyone can learn through practice.

- Understand that learning is not linear- educators must recognize that not all students learn in a linear way. Students do not have to master the basics in order to participate in higher-order thinking. Different topics, skills, and knowledge should be revisited over several years to allow students to develop a deep understanding of the content being taught to them. As a student grows and matures, so do their interpretations of complex topics (Young et al., 2017).

In the conclusion of this essay, Young et al. (2017) state that “culturally sustaining reflective education is the framework for a quality education that honors our students’ diverse backgrounds and educational needs” (p. 178).

As a multicultural educator, I find the expansion of Ladson-Billings’ (2014) work with culturally relevant pedagogy from Paris (2012) and Young et al. (2017) to be insightful and to truly honor multiple parts of a student’s identity. I identify as Metis or Michif. I grew up with multiple parts of my cultural identity, and my family honored traditions the multiple cultures that my Metis background represent—which include foods, dance, music, etc. The work of Paris (2012) and Young et al. (2017) help to support students like me—those who identify as more than one culture.

Multicultural education must first recognize that we are still learning new strategies to merge cultures together. LeClair (2008) states that we must first resist the genocidal gestures of appropriation. She goes on to say that we must not be afraid of cross-cultural work. Mistakes are inevitable. There is the idea that we can be both academics and Indigenous women—we can

identify as being part of more than one culture. LeClair (2008) refers to Vizenor's (1997) writing as a tool "to teach a new way of thinking, a way that deliberately violates conventional codes and obvious categories, as a tool of liberation" (p. 66). She also quotes Vizenor (1997), stating that it is not possible to translate Indigenous traditions and culture into the English language without giving privilege to that culture over the other (LeClair, 2008). This practice gives the dominant culture a master template by comparison, but we still, in fact, use the English language to do our work. How can we not? The remembered tradition of our Indigenous ancestors can grant us survival. By allowing ourselves to be visible—but not necessarily understood as we would generally prefer—is a beginning. A beginning to reimagine ourselves into an urban landscape that has attempted to eradicate us as Indigenous people (LeClair, 2008). It is this reimagination that helps us to decolonize education—in order to liberate ourselves from a dominance that has taken over us for generations.

Learning new ways to break away from the dominant culture helps us to survive—this includes finding new ways to teach younger generations. "Profound educational innovation requires reforms where 'the recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people'" (Battiste, 2002, p. 4). It is through this reformation that Indigenous knowledge systems act as a tool for resilience against the current neocolonial education systems that continue to oppress the Indigenous populations. The mainstream education system throughout the United States and parts of Canada continue to play a "significant role in assimilatory processes subjugating Indigenous knowledge while celebrating and promoting the dominant settler culture" (Arellano, Friis, & Stuart, 2019, p. 394). In order to reimagine ourselves in this landscape, we must first acknowledge that to be resilient, we must act as agents of change in order to accomplish an education system that empowers Indigenous

populations. The effects of colonization are still present today, for us to decolonize education systems, we must first go back to our “roots.” What this means for Indigenous populations is to learn how our tribes lived prior to being colonized. This is essential in the breaking away from the dominant culture—to learn how to live using the methods that we used before to promote resilience and health.

Decolonizing education through culturally sustaining pedagogy refers to an approach that recovers tribal practices that were present and in use prior to different periods of colonization through a reimagination of our current urban landscape. Tuck (2011) states that colonialism is not something historical, as Indigenous populations continue to see the effects of colonialism in the present. Tuck’s ideas of post-colonialism and decolonization are terms to be contested—as we are continuing to restore what we lost from colonialism. She goes on to say that curriculum for Indigenous populations needs to ‘repatriate’ or ‘restore our homeland’ when approaching education. Tuck (2011) refers to repatriating curriculum as “reclaiming our sovereignty, land, subsistence rights, cultural knowledge and artifacts, theories, epistemologies, and axiologies” (p. 35). Hatala et al. (2016) state that “resilience among [Indigenous] populations also involves moving beyond processes of returning to a previous state...toward embracing new ideas of transformation and adaption into something new” (p. 1914). This transformation is necessary to take ownership for the knowledge systems for Indigenous populations in order to be resilient within an education system. Reimagining ourselves in the urban landscapes begins in the restoration of the knowledge systems that taught us prior to mainstream education—prior to Indian Boarding Schools. Indigenous people believe cultural practices may serve as a tool for decolonization and heal the trauma of Indigenous people. According to Adamsen (2018), “It is

believed the cultural trauma experienced by this population is responsible for the epidemic of disease and decline in health” (p. 2). Decolonization is essentially using culture as medicine.

It is important to recognize the need for decolonizing education for Indigenous students. For Indigenous populations to build resiliency in an educational system, they must first take control of that system. This ownership and cultural connections placed in the educational system will help to heal these populations from the cultural trauma that Indigenous people have today. It is necessary to reimagine how an educational system could look like as Indigenous people take ownership of these systems. The cultural values of the Indigenous population will reflect in this shift of the educational system, which it thought to affect Indigenous student health. One way that we can take back ownership of our knowledge systems is to examine the different ways that Indigenous people were taught prior to education and reimagine it for the present day (i.e., oral storytelling/history, intergenerational teachers, and land-based education would be examples of prior teaching strategies among Indigenous populations).

### **Land-based Education**

Culturally sustaining pedagogy with Indigenous populations is currently being practiced one way through the use of land-based education initiatives. Arellano, Friis, & Stuart state that “education has been identified as playing a vital role in inducing an intercultural dialogue” (2019, p. 390). As an Indigenous educator and student, I find that education has led me to learn about and understand cultures other than my own. I often was the only Indigenous voice in my classroom, but I tried to share my perspective for others to understand my own views and background, too. One example of this type of dialogue was with one of my refugee students. We shared the differences between cultural names—I shared my ceremonial given name, and I learned that she had two names because one was her “legal name” and the other was her birth

name. She learned that my name was in a different language and was given by a medicine man. I learned that she had two names because when her family moved here, they did not completely understand some of the forms—which resulted in her legal name being different. This dialogue helped us to learn from one another—it helped me become a better teacher.

Land-based pedagogy is learning through activities that are based on Indigenous intergenerational knowledge of co-existing with the land. The land serves as the primary source of knowledge. Land-based pedagogy can look differently from tribe to tribe based on location (ex. some tribes are fisherman, some are hunters, some may practice both). Traditional hunting, trapping, and fishing practices within their epistemological meaning and values are examples of this type of intergenerational learning (Arellano, Friis, & Stuart, 2019). This is the type of initiative is used in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program in their efforts to teach about hunting, trapping, fishing, and learning about traditional plants. Land-based initiatives are used through a series of guest lecturers presenting to the kids about their expertise area. For instance, my aunt is a certified master gardener, and she is often one of the elders invited to present to the kids regarding traditional plants and the benefits of having a home garden.

Land-based education encourages a mutual respect centered on Indigenous relationships with the land, which serves as a model for ongoing resurgence and Indigenous knowledge revitalization (Arellano, Friis, & Stuart, 2019). Borrows (2016) states that land-based learning is connected to the Anishinaabe concept of *gikinawaabiwin*. According to Borrows (2016), “the idea this word conveys is that analogies can be drawn from our natural surroundings and applied to, or distinguished from, human activity” (p. 13). The word *akinoomaage* is also used to describe the phenomenon of learning from the natural world. It is formed from two root words from the Anishinaabe language “Aki” meaning earth and “*noomaage*” meaning to point towards

or take direction from. Both *gikinawaabiwin* and *akinoomaage* embraces Indigenous learning pedagogies which are both experiential and land-based. Indigenous students are drawing analogies from the natural world (*gikinawaabiwin*) and learning from those analogies (*akinoomaage*). Students describe how they are beginning to intellectually, physically, and spiritually grasp the perspectives of Indigenous knowledge systems (Arellano, Friis, & Stuart, 2019). Land-based learning promotes resilience, as it is actively contrasted through post-colonial education systems throughout the country (Arellano, Friis, & Stuart, 2019). Using the land as a way to learn rebuilds a relationship to the land that was lost over time. As a result, land-based learning allows us to revitalize lost language and culture for younger generations. It allows us to use contemporary tools (like new hunting gear) to help teach more traditional lessons (like respect for the animal without producing much waste). Despite Borrows taking on a viewpoint centered on the teaching of law, learning about the Anishinaabe views of land-based education was important to me, since this is part of my own culture. One of the many identities present among my tribe is Anishinaabe/Ojibway, and I grew up with many of these teachings. Land-based education not an initiative that is entirely new, but educators are coming up with new and interesting ways to carry out the ideas of *akinoomaage* in today's world. An example of this is through the educational efforts of programs like Belcourt Youth Activities Program, as it takes those principles and finds new ways to expose youth to them (i.e., using newer forms of fishing gear to teach older generational lessons).

The restoration of Indigenous knowledge systems in education is necessary to pass important cultural lessons for younger generations. Not only are land-based learning initiatives a successful method for the transmission of traditional knowledge, land-based learning can be implemented to make sure the culture survives. One issue that faces Indigenous people today is

when an elder passes away, sometimes their traditional knowledge passes with them. Using Indigenous knowledge systems and educational practices helps to make sure that the transmission of traditional knowledge takes place. The culture itself does not die—it serves as a tool for resilience and survival. Land-based education utilizes elders in the passing down of knowledge to younger generations, which helps to ensure that those lessons are protected and passed down for generations to have for years to come. When we pass down those teachings, we are ensuring our cultural survival—which promotes healthy spiritual, physical, emotional, and mental health. Using traditional knowledge practices to pass down important lessons to younger generations is a method of using culture as medicine. We are using traditional knowledge to heal from the trauma of our ancestors. The lessons will no longer be lost forever to pass with the elders, since it gives elders the opportunity to pass those lessons down. Culture as medicine not only promotes health, it promotes the survival of the knowledge as well.

### **Culture as Medicine**

Culture is thought to be a “system of values, beliefs, and ways of knowing that guide communities of people in their daily lives” (Trumbull, 2005, p. 35). When you look at culture collectively, it is race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, disability, sexual orientation, and so forth. For all of these characteristics factor into our daily lives and influence behavior, which also refers to the idea that culture is pluralistic; many of these factors help to shape who we are and we carry our multiple identities into our daily lives. Kumar & Janz (2010) discuss that culture does not have a single agreed upon definition. It refers to our activities and behaviors, as well as influences from our heritage and societal norms. It touches many parts of lives, which includes the choices that people make regarding food, clothing, individual and family activities, music, and spirituality. Culture is something that is carried across generations to help meet basic



needs and survival of people (Kumar & Janz, 2010). For Indigenous populations, the passing down of cultural knowledge and lessons is viewed as a holistic way of healing from historical trauma.

For wounds to heal from historical trauma, it is suggested that the Indigenous population must connect with their culture, since it is viewed as medicine that possesses protective and therapeutic power that promotes resilience (Bassett et al., 2012). One way of connecting is an oral-based knowledge system predominant among First Nations (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Stories are frequently told as evening family entertainment to pass along both local and family knowledge from one generation to the next. It has been an effective way of passing down numerous lessons from generation to generation.

In addition to oral-based knowledge systems, there have been studies that have examined the passing down of traditional knowledge from generation to generation. A link that was investigated by Kumar & Janz (2010) between culture and well-being was that of “cultural continuity,” which is the transfer of culture from one generation to the next. Research supports that the concept of cultural continuity is important, because it fosters personal identity development and assists with mental health, which prevents self-destructive behaviors (Kumar & Janz, 2010). There are many factors that are thought to contribute to cultural continuity. Some of these include language knowledge, land claims, self-governance, availability of cultural environment, as well as the provisions of having a culturally appropriate education, health care, police, and fire services. Czyzewski (2011) states that there are and have been direct effects of colonialism on Indigenous health status, such as “the introduction of contagious diseases like smallpox; the extinction of the Beothuk [a group of Indigenous people who lived on the island of Newfoundland], or the gamut of negative experiences within the residential schooling system, to

name a few” (p. 5). According to Czyzewski (2011), the disparities of Indigenous people reflect the effects “of land dispossession and sedentarization on cultural continuity, access to traditional economies, as well as physical separation from mainstream monetary economies” (p. 5).

Indigenous communities that practice cultural continuity help their youth find the tools to develop personal persistence, which protects them against self-harm behaviors (Kumar & Janz, 2010).

Teaching Indigenous youth to protect themselves against self-harm behaviors is an important practice for health prevention efforts. According to Legha & Novins (2012), there are many studies that have shown the benefits of traditional practices in health care treatment, addiction program models, and even for chronic pain management administered by traditional healers. Cultural practices used in the healing of Indigenous people include naming ceremonies, storytelling, drum and singing, preparing traditional meals, talking circles, sweat lodges, and sun dances, which have all been proved to have a positive correlation with Indigenous health.

Cultural practices used in healing include the preparation of traditional meals and following a traditional diet. According to Waziyatawin Angela Wilson, one of the authors of *For Indigenous Eyes Only*, Indigenous Peoples can “reverse” the “detrimental” effects of a colonized diet (2005, p. 75). In order to decolonize your diet, you must do a little research first. One can assume that you eat a diet low on sugar, high in protein, and free of processed foods, but how do you move forward with the commitment? Wilson et al. (2005) suggests finding out what your specific tribe’s diet looked like prior to colonization. This consists of knowing three different things: how it was harvested, what was hunted, and how it is prepared (Wilson et al., 2005).

Traditional Indigenous foods that were part of the common diet prior to colonization were healthy and served many purposes. Food and agriculture were not only considered a form of nutrition, but it was a part of the culture (Patchell & Edwards, 2014). Indigenous people cared and depended on the plants and animals that the Creator gave them, using them for food, medicine, ceremonies, community and health; they used all parts of the animal with minimal waste (Patchell & Edwards, 2014). Among the Indigenous population, a healthy and balanced lifestyle was paired with nature, which was a strong component of their traditional lives and values. Indigenous people balanced their health through food choices, hygiene, spiritual practices, medicine, and their lives (Patchell & Edwards, 2013). All the traditional foods consumed by this population also assisted them in being disease free, strong, and healthy. It is also widely believed that in Indigenous cultures, food is considered to be a cultural activity that helps to define identity and their relationships in tribal communities (Patchell & Edward, 2014).

In 2006, a survey was administered in Canada to populations of Metis people regarding cultural participation, which included questions about traditional diet practices. The findings of this survey were that approximately 87% of Metis people fished for pleasure, while 74% indicated they fished for food. The same survey also indicated 89% Metis people hunted for food. In 2006, approximately three in ten Metis people also shared that they gathered wild plants (which included sweetgrass, berries, and wild rice). These dietary practices strongly correlated with following traditional diet practices. Among Metis people, consuming a traditional diet and practicing related activities have engendered stronger connections to social and cultural aspects of Metis life (Kumar & Janz, 2010). Sharing wild meat and different staple foods was a common practice in Metis communities (Kumar & Janz, 2010). Following a traditional diet has implications for healthy gut microbiomes, which can affect your overall health. If a foreign food

is introduced to the gut microbiome, it can malfunction and make you sick. As a result of these findings, following a traditional Indigenous diet can serve as a method of using culture as medicine.

The medical science behind the human gut microbiome reinforces the idea that traditional diets can serve as a tool to improve health status among Indigenous populations. Medical researchers Mulle, Sharp, & Cubells (2013) state that traditional Indigenous diets have been known to affect the human gut microbiome. While most studies associated with the human microbiome have been done particularly in working with adults, there have been a few studies done on infants and children. What these studies have revealed are the insights into the developing gut microbiome. Medical researchers believe that human babies are born with sterile gastro-intestinal tracts, but immediately upon their birth, the microbes of the gut begin to colonize. Depending on how a child is born (whether caesarian or vaginal), has been linked to the development of the human microbiome. In addition, a child's human microbiome development is also influenced if the child was breast-fed or formula fed. By the age of three, the gut microbiome evolves and changes to resemble an adult's microbiome. Researchers believe that this information suggests that there is a "core microbiome" that is representative of a healthy individual. It is implied that the human gut microbiome serves a very specific and important purpose, leading researchers to question what the function of the gut microbiome is in our biology. The three theorized primary functions of the gut microbiome are nutrition, immune development, and pathology.

It has been proposed that the gut microbiome functions in our nutrient intake. The medical evidence for this functionality comes from infants, where the developing gut microbiome is enriched for genes involved in lactation, which is consistent with the idea of

lactose as an energy source from breast milk or formula. As a result, the gut microbiome may have developed as an adaptation to allow abstraction of the most energy from possible food sources. It has been theorized that an estimated that 10% of available calories in a western diet come from microbial fermentation of carbohydrates in the distal gut, providing an evolutionary rationale for the continued maintenance of a rich and extensive gut microbial community (Mulle et al., 2013). It is not uncommon for Indigenous people to be lactose intolerant (my entire family is lactose intolerant), because we cannot process lactose as a source of energy. However, we were all able to be breastfed, as it is a different type of milk than cow's milk. We were still able to get nutrients from our mother's milk, as it was still part of our traditional diets.

The gut microbiome may also serve to assist in the development of a healthy immune system. There is a known to be an interaction between the gastrointestinal mucosa and the commensal bacteria, largely supported by the part of the immune system (Mulle et al., 2013). There have also been studies using mice that expose evidence to a specific polysaccharide produced by *Bacteriodes fragilis* that interacts with the host immune system to induce proper T-cell development, as well as correct Th1/Th2 imbalances, and direct appropriate development of the spleen and other secondary lymphoid tissues (Mulle et al., 2013). This imbalance of cells contributes to our body's inability to fight off certain diseases, such as inflammatory bowel disease (intestinal immune-mediated disease), celiac disease (a multisystemic autoimmune disorder), obesity, or even certain types of cancer.

Researchers are just beginning to understand what comprises a "normal" human gut microbiome, but there are already several known associations between unhealthy states and abnormal or imbalanced gut microbiota in relation to human pathology. For example, the gut microbiome is characterized by a "loss of diversity" that has been particularly seen in obese

individuals. Abnormalities in the human gut microbiome have been shown to impact the individual by increasing risks for inflammatory bowel disease and heart disease.

In order to have a healthy microbiome, healthy diet habits are critical. The Specific Carbohydrate Diet was created by Elaine Gottschall, B.A., M.Sc. This specific dietary treatment is based on the theory that many disorders are caused by an “imbalance in the microflora or probiotics of the digestive tract” (Mulle et al., 2013, para. 8). When the balance of the gut is disturbed, overgrowth of microbes creates inflammation. This situation is similar to a sprained ankle, when the swelling that puts pressure on all the cells in the area of the digestive tract allow material from the digestive tract to breakout. This is often described as “leaky gut.” Damaging microbes can also move to the small intestine where they fight for nutrients and disrupt digestion by damaging the enzymes needed to break down food (like gluten, casein, soy, and corn). When certain carbohydrates are not completely digested, they often stay in the digestive tract and become “food” for unhealthy microbes. As the microbes digest their “food” of carbohydrates, the fermentation damages the digestive tract. It also causes nutrient deficiencies and digestive symptoms such as: mucous, diarrhea, constipation, gas and bloating, “itchy bum”, rashes, pain, & B12 and folic acid deficiency (Mulle et al., 2013).

It is unsurprising that diet would affect health outcomes. Food is a part of cultural tradition. Consuming a traditional diet and practicing related activities have engendered stronger connections to social and cultural aspects among Metis populations (Patchell & Edwards, 2014). There is a science behind how decolonizing diet can affect your human gut microbiome. As Indigenous people, making healthier choices in diet by going back to our dietary traditions would allow our bodies to maintain a healthier state. An Indigenous diet is described as “extraordinarily healthy” and “diverse” (Wilson, 2005, p.76). Due to colonization, some of the

prior dietary routines may not be as accessible now as it was in the past. As a result, Indigenous Peoples food restoration is challenging, but the results can significantly impact health status.

As I studied articles about this science, I connected it with my own background. My traditional diet did not include dairy products. My gut cannot digest dairy properly—which made me lactose intolerant. When I reflected more, I realized that my entire family was lactose intolerant. It makes sense to go back to my cultural roots in diet to omit dairy from my diet to maintain a healthier human gut microbiome. My inability to process foods that were not in a traditional diet is an example of gut health. This affects how we feel and process foods, thus contributing to obesity and disease.

Culture as medicine includes traditional knowledge taken from multiple topics. The traditional practices that have a direct correlation with healing are naming ceremonies, storytelling, drum and singing, preparing traditional meals, talking circles, sweat lodges, and sun dances. If these practices can be used in the process of healing, they can be used in using culture as medicine. We are healing from those practices and healing wounds from past traumas. In the next section, I explore how tribal elders viewed cultural practices in relation to their self-reported health status, which helps to reinforce the idea that traditional knowledge and practices help to heal us and serves as culture as medicine.

### **Cultural Activity Among Tribal Elders**

The National Resource Center on Indigenous Aging (NRCNAA) is funded by the Administration for Community Living under tribal Title VI programs through the Department of Health and Human Services. The NRCNAA conducts a health and social needs assessment every 3 years and has worked with over 300 tribes since 1994. They are currently in year 2 of Cycle VII. Indigenous elders rate on a scale how they view their own health status and share

whether or not they practice cultural traditions of their tribe. In order to be classified as an elder for this survey, participants must be 55 or older. The original purpose of the survey by UND was to assess the health and social needs of the Indigenous population of elders.

The first phase of the research project required permission through a tribal resolution from each participating tribe. In addition of a tribal resolution, permission was granted from the University of North Dakota Institution Review Board (IRB) to conduct this work under the project title “Health and Social Needs Assessment of Indigenous Elders (IRB-200712-139). The data utilized for analysis in this study was acquired from cycle VI, the “Identifying Our Needs: A Survey of Elders VI” and collected in the time span of April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2017. The survey was conducted by the NRCNAA in collaboration with tribes, villages, and homesteads within the U.S. with a total number of participating AI/AN elders for this cycle was N=18,134 respondents, 164 sites, and 267 tribes with an estimated response rate of 60 percent (Adamsen, 2018).

The survey instrument used in this study consists of self-reported (Indigenous elders) information related to general health status, activities of daily living, health care access, weight & nutrition, and demographics. The primary questions used in this study were health status, history of chronic disease, nutritional health, participation in cultural practices, and demographic variables that include gender, age, marital status, income, employment, and education (Adamsen, 2018).

Adamsen (2018) ran a study with this data set that showed a positive association between cultural participation and self-reported health status among Indigenous elders. When asked about their participation in Indigenous cultural practices, the odds of an Indigenous elder with “a good health status was higher for someone who participates in cultural practices compared to an



[Indigenous] elder who does not participate in cultural practices” (Adamsen, 2018, p. 59). It was found that Indigenous elders who indicated they participated in cultural practices, in fact, made them 32 percent more likely to say they have a good health status compared to those who indicated in the survey that they did not participate in cultural practices.

The findings of her study demonstrated that Indigenous elders who indicated ties with their cultural traditions were associated with higher self-perceived health status. Adamsen (2018) chose to focus her analysis on the most commonly perceived practices among Indigenous tribes which included powwows, sweat lodge ceremonies, sun dances, smudging, and preparing and consuming culturally based traditional foods. Adamsen (2018) recognized that “traditional practices vary among tribes;” so essentially these cultural traditions would depend on the specific tribe being studied. (p. 38). For example, some traditional foods of tribes would depend on the geographic area they are located (i.e., some tribes are fisherman, while others focused more on hunting practices). Adamsen’s (2018) study introduces the concept of “culture as medicine” at work. This points towards the further support of the theory that using cultural participation is, in fact, a medicinal way to help heal Indigenous populations. Cultural participation has an impact on self-reported health status of this population, which reinforces the idea that using cultural education and participation is important to this specific demographic.

### **Metis/Michif Culture as Medicine**

In addition to learning about the relationship between cultural participation and self-perceived health status, I wanted to explore the concept of culture as medicine in multi-ethnic Indigenous communities. There was a gap in the literature regarding populations with more than one Indigenous identity or cultural pluralism. In this study, I wanted to primarily focus on Metis people, because this is the group that I identify with personally and they are currently absent

from current research in the United States (commonly associated with only Canada). LeClair (2008) defines “Metis” as a verb, “a being and becoming, not tied to only one historicized territory, but evident throughout what we now call Canada” (p. 64). LeClair goes on to explain that in order to make sense of our own inquiries we must first understand our own identities, “we must determine our own identity within the parameters established by us” (Nyoongah qtd. In D’Cruz, par. 5). LeClair (2008) states that assumptions of Indigenous communities are fated to only refer to the past and constructing a new authentic identity that exists in the intersections of identities, in fact, is necessary. I argue that culturally sustaining pedagogy would be favored in communities where multiculturalism is present—such as that of a Metis community.

There are limited studies that focus on multicultural Indigenous populations. My own educational experiences helped to fuel my quest for answers about the best teaching strategies for multicultural Indigenous students. As I look back, I draw on an encounter with a non-Indigenous teacher telling me that my statements “were not entirely from an Indigenous standpoint” and to “restructure my views of what it means to be Indigenous.” I thought it was funny—a non-Indigenous teacher essentially telling me that I was not Indigenous enough. My reality is that I am a multicultural Indigenous person. I belong to a tribe that honors multiple aspects of culture—both the Indigenous identity, as well as the French-Canadian identity. Our Metis flag has an infinity symbol, which represents the two cultures coming together. My Metis identity was viewed as almost a temporary state (that I could ignore the French-Canadian aspect of my identity to focus only on my Indigenous identity), but in fact our flag shows the existence of our people forever—the multicultural Indigenous nation. It is because of this experience in academia that I wanted to focus on my people—the Metis nation—for my study.

Although there are limited studies on Metis populations in relation to their conflicting identities and cultural practices, there are a few that are important to note in my literature review. Kumar & Janz (2010) list specific cultural activities among Metis people, which includes hunting, fishing, trapping, fur trade, gathering wild plants, knowledge of language, participation in ceremony and religious practices, consumption of traditional foods, and attendance in Metis specific organizations/events. Language, traditional foods, ceremonies, traditional values, spiritual beliefs, history, stories, songs, traditional plants, and canoe journeys all can serve as cultural healing practices among Indigenous populations (Bassett et al., 2012). Cultural participation among Metis populations serve as culture as medicine and some Metis communities may vary in their cultural practices.

According to statistics generated by Kumar & Janz (2010) in a Canadian survey of Metis people, younger generations of Metis people are more likely to be involved in traditional arts and crafts than older Metis people. Among these practitioners, the most commonly reported types of art or crafts were beadwork, leatherwork, woodwork, weaving, sculpting, pottery, and painting (Kumar & Janz, 2010). Many Indigenous people will also maintain ties with their traditional spirituality, religion, traditions, and culture through participation in cultural events. These events include powwow, sweat lodge, social and political Indigenous organizations, and other traditional activities. Traditional spirituality and religion are a large part of maintaining holistic health and well-being among Metis people. Although spirituality and religious practices are diverse with Metis populations, many Metis have combined traditional Indigenous spirituality and Roman Catholicism (Kumar & Janz, 2010).

All Metis who participated in the cultural practice survey in 2006 who indicated they spoke a First Nation language also indicated they were bilingual or multilingual. Although it

was found that only a minority amount of those surveyed spoke Indigenous languages, approximately 48% of Metis adults indicated that learning, re-learning, or keeping their Indigenous language was “very” or “somewhat” important to them. Some Metis (approximately 39%) also indicated the importance of their children also learning Indigenous languages. Among the languages practiced, the most common among Metis were Cree, Ojibway, and Michif. According to Kumar & Janz (2010), the use of Indigenous languages is said to help foster relationships between the Metis and the land, water and food. This relates back to the land-based education that was discussed earlier in my literature review. Next, I will go into detail about another survey administered to Metis populations in Canada. This survey is different in that it focused on Metis youth and extracurricular activities. This study is also important to highlight in my research as it pertains to multi-ethnic Indigenous identity and its relationship to cultural practices.

### **Cultural Activity Among Metis/Michif Youth**

Extracurricular activities (including sports) have a positive relationship with academic achievement, psychological functioning, and peer relationships. They provide children with the opportunity to explore their own identities, emotions, as well as developing initiative and social skills. Physical exercise is known to be associated with positive health outcomes for Indigenous children with increased rates for self-esteem and non-smoking (Smith et al., 2010).

Indigenous children have two to three times greater risk of developing obesity and are likely to benefit from engaging in extracurricular activities outside regular school hours (Smith et al., 2010). They are more likely to perform well academically in school if they volunteer, spend time with elders, take part in social groups, as well as participate in sports, art, music, and cultural activities (Smith et al., 2010). More specifically, cultural identity helps to support

Indigenous health outcomes. Cultural identity is an essential component to support and to help healing in the Indigenous tradition (Smith et al., 2010). Participation in cultural activities helps to reduce rates of depression and lowers the likelihood of developing substance and alcohol abuse (Smith et al., 2010).

Data taken from the [Indigenous] Peoples Survey distributed in Canada attempted to measure the correlation between participation in cultural activities in Indigenous youth in relation to participation in extracurricular activities. These data relied heavily on parental reporting. They found that Indigenous children who participated in cultural activities, art, music, groups, or did volunteer work were also more likely to participate in sports. In addition to these findings, Indigenous children who regularly spent time with tribal elders were 20% more likely to participate in sports than those who did not, while knowledge of traditional language had no significant effect on sports participation (Smith et al., 2010). If a child who participates in cultural activities is more likely to participate in sports, in most cases, the student would be more physically fit. They are exercising more often than students who do not participate in cultural activities. This would lead me to believe that participation in cultural activities allows one to maintain a physical fitness routine, which would affect their overall health.

Sport participation was the most popular extracurricular activity among Metis children; however, cultural activities were considered to play an active role in their lives with 4 in 10 (46%) children taking part in both sets of activities (Smith et al., 2010). In addition to these findings, it was also found that Indigenous adults feel that many cultural activities (such as dancing and creating art) have a strong connection with positive emotions, identity, and aspirations (Smith et al., 2010). Spending time with tribal elders is also considered to have a strong correlation to participation in cultural activities among Indigenous students. Indigenous

children who had weekly interaction with tribal elders were approximately 76% more likely to participate in cultural activities compared to those who did not (Smith et al., 2010).

This survey examined cultural participation in relation to sports, which both influence health. They found connections that cultural participation influenced sports participation, as well as affected mood, identity, and student aspirations. Another important factor to note in this study is that they surveyed Metis parents of young students. This led me to make a similar approach to my own study. I examined adult perceptions of Metis health and wellness education in an Indigenous sports program. Culture as medicine continues to play an active role in Indigenous communities as it allows us to heal wounds from historical trauma using traditional knowledge.

### **Conclusions**

In my literature review, I first examined how the eradication of Indigenous culture contributed to the historical trauma of Indigenous populations. Historical trauma has been directly linked to the decline in health status among Indigenous people. Forced colonization of the Indigenous people has directly impacted their health as a result of historical trauma. Indigenous medicine can refer to the teachings of our ancestors if it is helping us to heal from historical trauma to contribute to our overall health. Decolonization is essentially using culture as medicine, as it helps us to recognize the need for social justice in Indigenous education. For Indigenous populations to build resiliency in an educational system, they must take control of that system and promote traditional lessons/ways of learning.

Culturally responsive teaching methods are important because they teach the whole child (Gay, 2000). It is a way to connect to the child by using their existing values, interests, and uses what is most important to them. We are making culture a priority in educational practice. As I progressed with my research, I found studies that have proven this method of teaching to be

effective—especially with Indigenous populations of students. It could potentially be a way to decolonize education moving forward, however it was found that it does not guarantee multiculturalism in the classroom. In order to guarantee multiculturalism in the class, we must take the concept of culturally responsive pedagogy further, by acknowledging culturally sustaining pedagogy as an effective way of teaching Indigenous students. Culturally sustaining pedagogy allows us to reimagine ourselves as Indigenous people in today’s multicultural world.

Decolonizing education takes place through the use of Indigenous knowledge systems and traditions. One method that was discussed in detail earlier in this literature review was land-based education. This method was highlighted in this literature review, because of its use in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. Land-based education initiatives are a way to learn through activities that are based on Indigenous intergenerational knowledge of co-existing with the land. The relationship that the Indigenous people have with nature serves as the primary source of knowledge. It gives elders the opportunity to share lessons with younger generations in hopes that they can learn to co-exist with the land, but it also reinforces the ideas of cultural survival by ensuring that the lessons are not lost forever. It ensures the passing down of traditional knowledge from our elders to younger generations.

The passing down of traditional knowledge from generation to generation as a method of teaching not only promotes learning among Indigenous populations, but also is linked with the concept of using culture as medicine. Culture as medicine uses the ideas that traditional healing practices of Indigenous people emphasized the use of ceremony, storytelling, sweat lodge, sun dances, traditional meals, talking circles, drumming, and singing. For instance, the practice of traditional diet relating to the science of the gut microbiome. If we learn traditional diet practices, we can eradicate a “leaky gut” to promote healthy eating habits with foods that are

found to be low in sugar and high in protein. These traditional foods are also more likely to react with our biological composition better (i.e., non-dairy for lactose intolerance). It is the traditional forms of healing among Indigenous populations that should be used in the practice of culture as medicine, all of which can be utilized throughout cultural education practices.

In addition to culture as medicine, I highlighted specific studies that examined cultural knowledge and participation in relation to health. This literature review examined how Indigenous elders perceived their own health status in relation to their cultural practices. Adamsen (2018) found that cultural participation among tribal elders was directly correlated to elders self-reporting higher health statuses. Studies were limited among Metis populations in relation to cultural participation, but the findings of these studies also contributed to the idea that those who had closer ties with their cultural traditions were more likely to report more physical activity, positive moods, connections with cultural identity, and were more likely to have aspirations. These findings supported the notion of using culture as medicine, which essentially means that culture can be used as a tool as both a means to heal and a form of decolonization to break away from the dominant culture.

In my research for this literature review, I found a gap in the current research regarding multiculturalism present in Indigenous communities. There was research of Indigenous populations; however, people like me (who identified as “mixed blood” and multi-ethnic) were essentially absent from the literature. As I began this study, I started with a couple of questions in mind: Can we truly decolonize education if we are multi-ethnic? Do I have to reject my French-Canadian heritage to decolonize and go back to my roots? These questions related more to my own identity and methodology. As I continued to examine the current literature, I then refined my research questions into the following five questions:



- How is culture used as medicine in a multi-ethnic youth sports program?
- How is use of medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators?
- What health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result culture used as medicine in the program?
- Can multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous culture be used as a tool for decolonization?
- What can be gained or what is the purpose of taking a multi-ethnic approach to Indigenous culture?

Research question one examined the teaching methodology used in the program design, which assists in the lesson planning of the curriculum. Research questions two and three examined health educators' perceptions and feelings of using culture as a tool for health and wellness.

Research questions four and five explore the concept of taking a multi-ethnic approach to health education and if it can be viewed as a tool for decolonization, as well as determine the benefits of using such an approach to Indigenous health education in a community with multiple cultural identities present. Current research regarding Indigenous healing and culture as medicine only pertain to Indigenous identity as something singular—we only have one cultural identity. It is these research questions that I believe that will further inform my inquires as a multi-ethnic Indigenous person. If we take on more of a culturally sustaining approach to Indigenous education, are we still using culture as medicine? Can we still decolonize if we acknowledge that we may have multiple cultural identities? This was the gap of the literature that I wanted to explore in my own study.

### CHAPTER III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions of multicultural health educators' views on the effectiveness of using multi-ethnic approaches for health education in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. This chapter includes a detailed explanation of choices made in research design and data analysis using a decolonized approach to the selected research design, as well as describes the procedures and methods used in this study including interview structure with questions in relationship to the research questions that utilized the process of tribal consultation. This tribal consultation that took place was in hopes to ensure cultural sensitivity for Indigenous participants.

Although I understand that tribal consultation is uncommon for western research methodology, it was a crucial step in understanding the cultural sensitivity of the Indigenous research participant group being studied. According to Lambert (2014), Indigenous researchers (such as myself) "...must be true to our Indigenous values, culture, and ways of knowing and gathering data" (p. 69). In order to stay true to this identity, I worked closely with the Tribal Nations Research Group to help consult on his project, as well consulted with other stakeholders (such as the Turtle Mountain Community School and the Belcourt Youth Activities Program) in order to ensure they had an active role in this study. This was done to maintain my identity as an Indigenous researcher, but also to maintain that the data would offer something back to its Indigenous stakeholders. Using tribal consultation is a decolonized approach that allows for the understanding that ownership of data conducted with Indigenous populations belongs to the specific tribe being studied, thus, protecting tribal sovereignty and protection of Indigenous populations being studied. As a result, the data collected from this study are given back to benefit the tribe. Moreover, this project practices a decolonized approach to western research

models by allowing the tribe to take more of an active role in the research planning and data collection process.

This methodology also includes the addition of Covid-19 related changes using online survey/interview options, as this study was affected by Covid-19 since it took place in the Fall of 2020 during the pandemic. Ideally, early planning stages were to conduct in-person interviews that required travelling to the reservation. In order to guarantee that every eligible participant who wished to provide an interview had opportunity, it was also planned that transportation would be provided (or I would travel to them) in order to ensure that every participant had the opportunity to provide an interview. In order to maintain social distancing guidelines, changes had to be made to ensure the health and safety of our participant group. It was for these reasons the methodology was redesigned to reflect these changes by allowing for online and phone options for participants in this study.

This study examines the perceptions of multicultural Indigenous health educators' views of teaching strategies and methodology used in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP). In this study, data was collected in the form of interviews and online surveys of multi-ethnic Indigenous wellness educators. Data were first examined to determine if the approach by BYAP was a multi-ethnic approach to Indigenous education. Once this was determined, data were then analyzed to examine the effectiveness of using multi-ethnic approaches for health education for Indigenous students. Using the information gathered for decolonizing methodologies helped to serve as justification in creating my own coding tool. This methodology utilized the use of the medicine wheel or "Sacred Hoop" as an analytical tool to help sort information to determine how data gathered pertained to Indigenous health and wellness. To gather data for this research project, I first had to determine the specific research participant group that I would interview. In

the next section of this dissertation, I will cover how participants were chosen to participate in this research project, as well as specific information about the Belcourt Youth Activities Program and why it was chosen for this study.

### **Belcourt Youth Activities Program**

The purpose of my research was to explore the relationship between cultural identity and education with Indigenous health education efforts. It is important to note that I have personal ties to the specific reservation being studied (Turtle Mountain Indian Reservation in Belcourt, ND) in which I am enrolled. These ties to the reservation being studied had its advantages, as I understood the specific background of the reservation and relationships with stakeholders in the study. It was also easier for me to seek out participants, as I had an established repertoire and commonalities with them. I also was a former employee of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP), which is the sample group. I chose this reservation and program, since they have already implemented a summer program aimed at using culture to counteract health disparities. I had prior knowledge of the BYAP and its cultural program, which I knew approached culture from a multicultural viewpoint, and I believed this was unique to the area.

The Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP) has worked in coalition with the National Youth Sports Program serving the Belcourt, ND area since 2004. It promotes healthy lifestyle choices for area youth, urging them to take part in physical fitness and make healthy choices such as refraining from drug and alcohol usage. BYAP is open to area youth ranging between the ages of 8-18 and requires all its participants to have a physical on file. The program runs Monday-Friday for a period of four weeks in the summer. It is a half-day schedule for students that starts at 9:30 and ends at 1:30 in the afternoon. What makes Belcourt Youth Activities so unique is that it pairs a sports-based curriculum with a health and culture education

curriculum. The summer camp builds itself on the multi-ethnic identity of the students and staff using multiple local area cultures (Ojibway, Anishinaabe, Cree, and Metis/Michif).

Boyer (2005) wrote an article about integrating the Seven Teachings into educational practice based on an interview with the Turtle Mountain Community College. This philosophy of education seemed to have started at the tribal college and it spilled over into the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. Originally, when the program was created in coalition with the college, it also seemed to be built on these teachings. Despite the Belcourt Youth Activities Program being moved to the community high school, these teachings are still present today. Culturally responsive pedagogy takes the values of the student into consideration when approaching curriculum, so it only makes sense to use these Seven Teachings in a community where Anishinaabe people are present, as it is based on the values of the community and its culture. It teaches you a way of life, which is of importance to the culture and the community. As a result, more than one educational entity in the Turtle Mountain area uses the Seven Teachings as a basis for educational curriculum. For the purposes of this study, it was also an essential step to work closely with the Turtle Mountain community to ensure that this study was culturally sensitive to the tribe.

### **Tribal Consultation**

As an Indigenous researcher, one aspect of my methodology was to ensure that I approached my research with the utmost cultural sensitivity. According to Lambert (2014), Indigenous researchers (such as myself) "...must be true to our Indigenous values, culture, and ways of knowing and gathering data" (p. 69). In addition to the concept of staying true to Indigenous identity, it is also necessary to recognize that Indigenous communities have not had the opportunity to benefit from studies on their people. Fitzpatrick et al. (2016) states that past

research studies that have failed to meet the best interests of the Indigenous populations being studied. “Many research studies have been conducted in Indigenous communities, however non-Indigenous researchers have not always addressed community priorities, nor collaborated in research with Indigenous people” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016, p. 1). To be culturally sensitive and ensure that Indigenous research benefits the community (rather than just the individual researcher), it is necessary to go through the tribal Institutional Review Board in addition to their university’s IRB.

All formal human subjects research related to scholarship goes through the process of approval through the Institutional Review Board. North Dakota State University’s (NDSU) Institutional Review Board (IRB) states that NDSU is “committed to protecting the rights, safety and welfare of all individuals participating in NDSU research projects” (2015, para. 1). Institutional Review Boards are historically very colonized practices, however the NDSU IRB’s ultimate goal is to protect the welfare of those participating in research conducted by the institution. NDSU also grants “additional protections for those of vulnerable populations” (IRB, 2015, para. 1). One population group that the NDSU IRB identifies as vulnerable is that of Native Americans. However, both historically and traditionally, the institution or individual who funds and collects the raw data has an intellectual right to the use and or publish the data or its analysis. This assumption creates a western research paradigm’s expectation that intellectual property belongs to the institution rather than the group being studied. “It is morally and ethically right for the community to own the stories collected as data, not the researcher, not the university, or the government” (Lambert, 2014, p. 33). This statement is true—it needs to be a collaborative effort with tribal communities, especially given the fact that Indigenous research belongs solely to the tribe rather than the institution or the individual.

In order to work collaboratively and be respectful when working with Indigenous tribes, we must first know the history of tribal sovereignty and self-governance. What does it mean to be sovereign and have self-governance? The United States Congress has “recognized the right of tribes to have a greater say over the development and implementation of federal programs and policies that directly impact them and their tribal members” (BIA, 2016, para. 43). They enacted two major pieces of legislation that together embody the important concepts of tribal self-determination and self-governance: The Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, as amended (25 U.S.C. 450 et seq.) and the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 (25 U.S.C. 458aa et seq.) to protect this right of self-governance (also referred to as tribal sovereignty). Tribal sovereignty grants the rights given to Indigenous populations to govern themselves within their own legal borders in the United States. Congress also wanted to uphold the principle of “tribal consultation,” whereby the federal government consults with tribes on federal actions, policies, rules or regulations that will directly affect their people (BIA, 2016). As a result of this “tribal consultation” principle, Indigenous research subjects can be additionally protected by having the opportunity to consult on how they want research to be conducted on them with an emphasis on Indigenous value sets—which is a similar process to what IRB needs to follow with their own approval that is contingent on the tribe’s approval for the research to be conducted. Fitzpatrick et al. (2016) states that “ethical guidelines emphasize the need to approach Indigenous communities, governing bodies and leaders for consent prior to approaching individual participants” (p. 15). What this means is that the tribal consultation is important, since often the language used with research can be difficult to understand for research participants. Fitzpatrick et al. (2016) concludes their argument by stating that “communication aids an involvement of local Indigenous researchers [which] can help overcome language and

cultural barriers when seeking consent” (p. 15). For these reasons, researchers would not go directly to their participants for consent, but rather work in collaboration with tribal communities. As a result, tribal consultation took place for this research project, which took place in order to overcome possible cultural and language barriers despite already being enrolled in the tribe studied. This was an attempt to ensure cultural sensitivity, disrupt the colonized tendencies of the IRB, as well as to increase awareness of my own possible cultural biases that I may not be aware of prior to the start of this study.

### **Tribal Nations Research Group**

My tribe (The Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians) have their own tribal research group that conducts IRB reviews and has their own specific set of codes to follow that are separate from institutional IRB protocol. According to Lambert (2014) “...there is a protocol that must be followed, and that is usually controlled by the tribe or community” (p. 65). My home community follows this process in order to collaborate on research projects conducted on the reservation. The purpose of the Tribal Nations Research Group (Turtle Mountain IRB program) is “to improve the quality of life for all tribal members through culturally-competent, custom-fit research” (Frederick, 2019, p. 7). There are a number of different reasons why a research group was implemented. Many of them were a guiding force in its creation—which is why a decolonized tribal IRB is so unique. The following reasons that illustrate how it strives to build capacity in conducting research with tribal nations:

- Tribal Leaders had no control of the research being conducted on the reservation, but now they do. They can now access the data they need to make decisions or do strategic planning.



- Students have help in locating articles or data to support their efforts in writing papers, thesis, or dissertations. Researchers have support to find data to support their research.
- Research results are now utilized or communicated to the community being studied.
- The storage of data and data collection systems is coordinated and comprehensive.
- Health Care Administrators can make informed decisions about what essential services the community needs.
- Program Directors and Grant Writers can access the data they need to make decisions about their programs or services needed within our community.
- It assists in helping to coordinate tribal infrastructure, as well as the tribe's economic development.
- Research projects can help to identify community needs/issues/how to address the issues (Frederick, 2019).

While tribal IRB programs are not the norm (with the Tribal Nations Group being one of the first)—other tribes are taking notice and in the process of implementing their own tribal research boards as well. This utilization of their “tribal consultation” rights are due to the high need to protect the people and the culture. The Tribal Nations Research Group was the tribal consultation group that was utilized in this study, as it was also required by the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa in order to conduct research on the reservation.

### **Covid-19 Related Changes**

In early January 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced a novel coronavirus in Wuhan, China. A “novel coronavirus,” which refers to it as a new type of coronavirus that has not been previously discovered (WHO, 2021). Later that month, the United

States announced its first case of COVID-19, which is a strain of the coronavirus that is named for the year in which it first appeared globally. On January 31, 2020, the World Health Organization issued a global health emergency (AJMC, 2021). Three days later, the United States declared a public health emergency. In March 2020, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic and President Trump declared COVID-19 a National Emergency (AJMC, 2021). The IRB protocol submissions for this study also began in March of 2020. After the pandemic and public health emergency announcements were made, many schools worldwide made the decision to switch to distance learning in order to maintain social distancing guidelines (at least six feet apart). People were encouraged to wear face masks and social distance at least 6 feet apart for health safety measures in hopes to not to further spread the virus.

During the initial planning stages of this study, it was decided to use personal narratives gathered through a series of interviews from BYAP employees and lecturers. Unfortunately, with the growing concerns brought on by the global coronavirus pandemic, data collection plans were changed for safety reasons.

Originally, it was planned to conduct in-person interviews by travelling to the school and/or home interviews by request to maintain accessibility to all possible participants. In order to remain accessible to participants (but continuing to maintain safety measures), it was decided to offer options to narrative participants. An online Qualtrics survey would be shared with individual participants utilizing either email and/or social media platforms. An invitation to collect their narratives through an online Zoom interview was also given as an option if people preferred or they were unable to complete the online survey. Anyone without access to a computer would be given the opportunity to conduct the survey over the phone if needed as well. By providing multiple options for participants, I tried to ensure accessibility for everyone.

There was an incentive that was offered to participants through the opportunity for a raffle. The raffle was for one of four possible \$20 gift cards for gas or grocery through a local business of their choice. During the distribution of the online survey, this was explained to the possible participants that an incentive raffle would be conducted at the end of the data collection. Those who participated in the survey/interview would be entered the raffle as a thank you for their participation. Once a participant completed the survey, it would redirect them to a different online survey for their name, phone number, and email address in order to be put in for the raffle. This information was not linked to their previous survey, so it protected the confidentiality of their original responses. Their contact information was only used in order to contact the winners of the raffle at the end of the data collection process.

After approval of both the NDSU IRB and Tribal Nations Research Group in September 2020, a request for staff emails was made to the BYAP Program Director. Given the status of the coronavirus pandemic, it was found to be challenging to collect both the survey and informed consent forms physically. The feedback from the consultation with the BYAP Program Administrator was to include the Facebook Group for staff and use phone numbers to text the online Qualtrics survey out to staff members with an implied consent using the Qualtrics form. To protect anonymity of participants, the informed consent was on the first page of the survey with the specific language "by clicking forward to the next page, I am giving my consent to be a participant in this study." Data collection began for this study in October 2020.

In March 2020, the NDSU Institutional Research Board made three recommendations that specifically applied to this study.

- a. The board recommends that researchers voluntarily suspend all in-person human subject research covered by an NDSU IRB protocol until further notice. This includes

- all research activities that involve face-to-face interaction between a researcher and a participant (recruitment, interviews, focus groups, laboratory studies).
- b. The board recommends that all researchers who can conduct their research virtually (online) switch to that format immediately.
  - c. Suspending human subjects testing may be disruptive to planned courses of study for graduate students. We strongly encourage research supervisors and student research committees to develop alternative plans for the completion of student projects to eliminate or minimize ongoing human subjects testing (NDSU IRB, 2020).

The collection of interviews via Zoom and online survey options were chosen given the IRB restrictions while conducting research during the COVID-19 pandemic; these methods were not my ideal method to collect data. However, given the current state of the country from the coronavirus pandemic and the vulnerability of Indigenous populations, it was necessary to change protocol to best fit the health needs of participants.

### **Participants**

Before a Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP) Educational Model could be identified for this study, data needed to be collected from staff and guest lecturer participants in the summer wellness program. The participants for this study were purposefully selected solely on whether they had taught and/or presented in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (there were roughly 20+ potential interviews). For recruitment purposes, both past and current employees were eligible to participate in the study, which totaled a span of over 16 years. Using multiple options simultaneously, possible participants were contacted through email, social media, and word of mouth. Participants were provided with options to complete the study using an online survey or a one-time interview conducted through Zoom in order to maintain

accessibility for all participants. Once research questions and participants were selected for this project, it was necessary to gain approval from both the institution and tribal institutional review boards.

After many attempts of adapting due to Covid-19 and conducting interviews through Zoom and offering an online survey option for those who could not do a Zoom interview, I was able to gather information from 22 individuals. There were 14 interviews and 8 online surveys submitted over the course of a month. Two online surveys were partially incomplete, but due to the confidentiality of the survey, I was unable to follow up with these participants. These two participants completed the first portion of the demographic questionnaire but did not complete the follow-up interview questions except to define the term Metis. This information was included in the questionnaire results as well as the terminology used for the term of Metis. This decision was made as it was my hope to respect the views of all participants who chose to share information, regardless of how much information they chose to disclose. “The researcher has a moral obligation to support the community in their belief that their collective experiences, knowledge, and history are valuable” (Lambert, 2014, p. 62). It was for these reasons, that I chose to include this information, as I also believed the information that they chose to disclose before submitting an incomplete survey was still valuable information in creating a collective understanding of how cultural identity is viewed by the study participants. The data that the two incomplete surveys provided were still utilized up to the point when they submitted the survey with only the last portion of their questions not filled out. Since they were unable to complete the survey, however, they were not eligible for the raffle incentive.

Those who chose the Zoom interview gave considerably more information compared to those who chose the online survey. This was not a surprise, as Indigenous culture emphasizes

oral history and the power of story. “Although stories are traditionally used to highlight lessons in morality or of confirming identity, in this work stories are used to tell of people’s experiences” (Lambert, 2014, p. 29). My study examined the views of traditional educators and their experiences teaching in a summer wellness program, so oral stories shared in interview provided more information. Although the online survey did not produce quite as detailed accounts of personal experience and views, it still produced valuable information that often reinforced what was being said by those interviewed. In addition to this information, all participants in this study filled out the required demographic questionnaire given with the interview and online survey options completely.

### **Instruments**

In this study, there were a series of online surveys and Zoom interviews with tribal elders and educators in Belcourt Youth Activities Program that used culture to approach physical and emotional health among Indigenous students. The online survey and interview aim to determine how Indigenous multi-ethnic culturally relevant teaching practices relate to health education. This examines the effects that cultural identity has on Indigenous health and wellness in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program, how its multi-ethnic health education functions in current practice, as well as determining whether this method of cultural education is viewed as a form of decolonizing education by its practitioners. The teaching methodology favored a multi-ethnic approach to education using a series of different subcultures that comprised most of the local community (Ojibway, Anishinaabe, Cree, and Metis). Specifically, the data collected in this study were Zoom interviews and the distribution of online surveys with the permission of the Tribal Nations Research Group (tribal consultation) and the research participants themselves. The interview included the following: a semi-structured interview about health and cultural

educators' experiences participating in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program and their thoughts on traditional health education effectiveness as it relates to youth status.

The online survey was sent to participants via email and/or social media using the following message:

Hi everyone, I am conducting a study on the effects of BYAP's Culture program in relation to its health benefits. I was wondering if you can take a few minutes to complete the attached online survey. The survey can be found here: [site link] The survey is 17 questions—which includes the consent form information. Please fill out to the best of your ability with as much information as possible. If you prefer to conduct a Zoom interview--please let me know. I will be happy to set one up with you. I am raffling four \$20 gas/grocery gift cards for participants in the survey/interview [participants were entered into a raffle for four possible gift cards, as the funds were not available to provide all 22 participants with compensation for their time]. It will ask for your name and contact information at the end of the survey. Please be reassured that this is stored separately and all the answers from your survey will remain anonymous. Both past and current BYAP employees are eligible to take the survey, so please feel free to share with anyone you know from the program. Let me know if you have any questions.

This online survey option was option for a total of 4 weeks before it was closed in order to collect responses in this study. If an individual indicated that they wanted to fill out an online survey by responding to this message as so but did not fill it out in a two-week timeframe, a follow-up email or social media message was created, and an interview option was offered instead. Individuals who indicated that they preferred a Zoom interview made appointments in

their own free time. This was to ensure that anyone who wished to be part of the study had ample time and instrument options available for their participation.

Recordings of the Zoom interviews were taken with permission. Recordings were taken via password protected computer; they were stored, transcribed, then deleted. The interview transcriptions were first shared with the participant to check for accuracy, after this process to check for accuracy, both the transcriptions and online survey data were distributed back to the Tribal Nations Research Group, as well as the Belcourt Youth Activities Program in coalition with the Turtle Mountain Community Schools. If specific names were used during this study in interview, they were blacked out in order to ensure confidentiality before the transcription was sent back to the tribe.

As I conducted each interview, I wanted to be mindful of the differences in opinions and culturally respectful of how each participant viewed their own cultural identity. I sat and I listened—which is what I was taught to do as I was learning growing up. It was our Indigenous way—to sit and listen to your elders as they told you stories. It was how we learned and that was my intention in this study---to learn. Once data were transcribed, a thorough analysis was conducted of each individual narrative provided. An analysis of the interviews and online survey was conducted using Post-Colonial Theory, Tribal Critical Race Theory, and appreciative inquiry that primarily emphasized the use of a medicine wheel, which will be explained in further detail later in this chapter.

The following is the series of questions that I asked participants through the option of an online survey or Zoom interview:

*Short Questionnaire:*

- How long have you worked with the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP)?



- What is your role with the program?
- What is your preferred term for your cultural identity?

The purpose of the questionnaire prior to interviews was to understand the capacity of the survey participant's involvement with the program. Although participant involvement was not a specific research question in this study, I was interested if the length of time had an influence on their responses regarding methods and observations (i.e., do people who have worked with the program longer noticed more changes in student outcomes or has someone who just started notice something different?) It seemed like something to take note of for this study, since the program has been operating for so long. The changes in different roles were thought to possibly have a factor in responses as well, so this was also recorded in the questionnaire. As someone who previously worked with the program, I was already aware of how roles and length of service directly relates to the amount of interaction an employee would have with both the cultural class and students (i.e., a camp administrator has limited interaction with students vs. someone who leads an activity). If role and/or length of service did affect responses, this will be addressed in the results section. A professional only sees students for one particular class per day, mentors are with the same set of students each day, administrators tend to only see students during all group presentations or behavioral consults, and lecturers may only see students when they present for one day of the entire program (once per age group). Given that each set of roles has different contact with students and the culture program, this was another important factor to note in the instrument.

The demographic questions in the questionnaire helped to address two specific research questions in my study: (1) How is medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators; and (2) What health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result of the culture used as medicine. Given

the unique background of each grouping, I thought it to be important to highlight these two differences in roles, as well as how long that they have worked with the program. It was believed that these demographics could be compared with how certain roles/lengths of service could influence research participants' perceptions of certain aspects of BYAP. As noted above, each assigned role has a varying level of contact with the culture program as well as students. Since we were examining their perceptions of the program, this was an important factor to note in the study.

### **Protecting Indigenous Narrative**

For Indigenous populations to be comfortable enough to share openly and honestly, data need to be collected and handled with great care. Chilisa (2012) argues that, “[Indigenous] ways of seeing reality, ways of knowing, and value systems are informed by their Indigenous knowledge systems and shaped by the struggle to resist and survive the assault on their culture” (p. 13). This statement was significant to my position because it articulates the importance of the protection of Indigenous value systems by Indigenous people and their cultures. Due to these circumstances, all Indigenous research should be approached with utmost sensitivity.

In the early stages of my study, I determined the best methodology would be to decolonize my approach to interviewing to best ensure cultural sensitivity. First, I determined that participant interviews related directly to personal oral narratives in Indigenous culture, as participants are essentially sharing oral narrative stories of their learning experiences. Gunn Allen (1991) uses a metaphor that describes oral narratives from an Indigenous lens: oral tradition is a “living body” that has a continuous flux that allows it to “change” itself to real-life situations in people’s lives (p. 2110). The continuous change in flux is also believed to be the narrative’s strength, as well as its greatest weakness. An example of this change in flux is

changing a narrative to fit a specific cultural bias—such as the narratives of Pocahontas varying greatly between that of the Powhatan tribe and that of its colonizers. The narrative takes a different shape to fit its specific purpose from its storyteller. When reality is situated in a racist, prejudiced, and classist system, the oral narratives will reflect those values (Gunn Allen, 1991). As a result, people’s minds will unconsciously accept those same values and not even notice the shift. What this means is that when exposed to the outside world, these oral narratives can evolve to represent a set of values that is not truly representative of the Indigenous values that the oral narrative originally set out to convey.

The shift of values can occur in narrative is something to consider in my approach, as participants want their narrative to convey its intended meaning. Gunn Allen (1991), who is a Laguna Pueblo and a Critical Theorist, makes an argument about how Indigenous narratives need to be handled with extreme and deliberate care by the listener. Gunn Allen (1991) explains that oral narratives (in this case—interviews) are a record of people’s culture that is the creative source of both their collective and individual selves. Once that source is tampered with, their sense of self is tampered with as well. She argues that when the Indigenous sense of self is tampered with by the assumptions of the ‘white world,’ using for its own ends, serious consequences for the people and their cultures are to be expected (Gunn Allen, 1991). She ends her argument saying that, “if oral tradition is altered in certain subtle, fundamental ways, if elements alien to it are introduced so that its internal coherence is disturbed, it becomes a major instrument in colonization and oppression” (Gunn Allen, 1991, p. 2110). The Indigenous knowledge system, shaped by resistance and survival, centers around one key concept in research and culture: decolonization. “Decolonization” is defined as “to present Indigenous culture and knowledge ‘with the goal of lifting the burden of colonialism by visioning new

realities” (Simpson, 2011, p. 34). Indigenous history denotes that when the early settlers tried to colonize Indigenous Peoples, they established their domination over the culture. Moreover, decolonization acts as an overall conceptual framework for researchers working with Indigenous populations. Indigenous researchers emphasize decolonization and its importance when conducting research with Indigenous people. When Indigenous People attempt to decolonize, they take some of that identity back as an attempt to protect themselves, their culture, and their people.

According to Grande (2004), Red pedagogical approaches to research ask that as Indigenous researchers, we examine Indigenous communities and policies as our own (rather than within a dominant society’s narrative), and we take seriously the perception that we are acting as revolutionary agents rather than as trying to understand who we are as Indigenous. The first step toward conducting research and keeping our identities as Indigenous scholars is the empowerment of decolonization. What this means is that we, as Indigenous researchers, must seek out the answers to the questions that would benefit our people. Reimagining research as something that can benefit our people and share that information with the tribes being studied in terms that we can all understand. This is what makes our research revolutionary by using the Indigenous voices to benefit the Indigenous populations.

It is common for Indigenous people to associate scholarly research and transitioning oral narratives to something misappropriated and not used to benefit them (Wilson, 2008). This is the major risk that they are looking at when sharing their narratives—whether it would truly benefit them or benefit non-Indigenous people. This may mean that many studies conducted with Indigenous communities won’t benefit the Indigenous participants, but rather the larger non-Indigenous groups. According to Anyon, Ferguson, Jackson, and Lane (1994), oral traditions

have assisted in helping to validate Indigenous history for Indigenous people because “these histories [stories] reflect direct knowledge of events” (para. 11). Indigenous People do not have a written history, so they rely on this oral history to validate their own historical occurrences to younger generations. Thomas King (2005) speaks of the importance of stories and how they come to shape who we are as Indigenous people. These stories hold a valuable part of our identity as Indigenous people to share history, values, and lessons of our culture.

There is a concern that some of these stories when transitioned into a written form create a fixed literary image of these oral traditions that can be misused or misinterpreted by others—which is a risk for Indigenous people when allowing a researcher to convert these stories to written text. It can then be viewed as a reduction of these stories for a simple point of reference in years to come (Anyon, Ferguson, Jackson, & Lane, 1994). There are certain stories that have their oral to written adaptations represent quite distinct changes. Nanaboozhoo is one such example, with multiple written and oral adaptations concerning his story, some of which loosely resemble each other.

When approaching the interview and transcription process, I reflected on the risks that Indigenous participants were taking with sharing their narratives and the conversion to written text for this study. In order to protect the narrative of my participants, their interviews were transcribed verbatim. I also made the informed decision that when analyzing participant quotes, the entire quote would be analyzed within its context. I will go into further detail about this process in the next section.

### **Transcription & Analytical Tool**

During the transcription process, I chose to listen to the audio interview repeatedly as I typed it out verbatim. I relistedened to the interview to check the interview transcription for

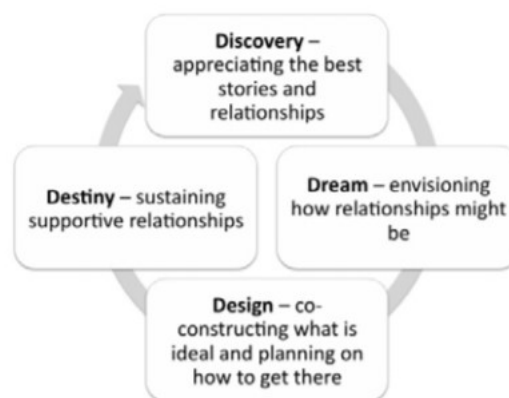
accuracy. This was in the hope to ensure the risk of a possible shift in the narrative would be reduced and the narrative would not be misinterpreted. The time duration of interviews ranged between 18-44 minutes with some interviewees going into more detail than others. A copy of the transcription was then emailed to each participant for their review. They were given the opportunity to either clarify or edit the transcript if they felt like the quote did not communicate what they were trying to say or explain. Participants then would email back the changes they wanted or that they approved the transcript. Again, this step was to ensure that a narrative did not shift in its intended meaning once it was converted to written text. According to Lambert (2014), “principles of ethics for Indigenous researchers are simply stated: kindness, caring, sharing, and respect” (p. 63). It was for these reasons that a copy was then created, and they were instructed that they can keep a copy for their own safe keeping or use. By giving the written transcription back to the participant, researchers are also allowing for the principle of research belonging to the tribe rather than the researcher or institution. This transcription process with extra steps to check for accuracy by the research participants was to ensure that their narratives were cared for and could not be misunderstood. It was also an opportunity to share their information with them in addition to writing them a thank you email to ensure that I showed the utmost respect for their stories.

As an Indigenous researcher, I often referred to my own experiences and my culture for inspiration. I was torn with the idea of coding interviews, as the many coding strategies that I covered in graduate school reflected the dominant society’s approach to narrative and analysis. Mainstream approaches to coding categorize pieces of the quotes and breaks them down into smaller pieces. My reservations to coding were because I did not want the narrative to shift with its intended meaning. I wanted to protect the narrative and keep it within its intended context.

With this principle in mind, I decided on appreciative inquiry as an approach that “has the potential to address gaps in knowledge by revealing ways to take action” (Hung, Phinney, Chaudhury, Rodney, Tabamo, & Bohl, 2018, p. 1). Cram (2010) states that appreciative inquiry has “transformational elements...[that] reside in its claims that it generates new knowledge and that is results in generative metaphors that compel new action” (p. 2). It is believed that appreciative inquiry “offers a positive way to explore, discover possibilities, and transform systems” working toward a shared vision (Hung et al., 2018, p. 2). Appreciative inquiry has four cycles (demonstrated in the figure below), which are discovery, dream, design, and destiny/delivery. The discovery stage what is best about the group or program through appreciative interviews that primarily focus on the positive. The dream stage involves the creation of a collective vision that brings to light the aspirations of the stakeholders. The design stage constructs the structures that support the dream. Finally, the destiny/delivery stage of the cycle is about the commitment of the stakeholders to achieve the aspirations of the group or program.

### **Figure 1**

*An Appreciative Inquiry Relational 4-D Cycle (Cram, 2010)*



*Note:* Adapted from Cram (2010), Stavros & Torres (2005), and Trushel (2007)

Although changes happen throughout all the phases of the appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle, the destiny/delivery phase “focuses on paths forward” (Cram, 2010, p. 5-7). The appreciative approach involves a collaborative inquiry that is primarily based on interviews “to collect and celebrate the good news of a community—those stories that enhance cultural identity, spirit, and vision” (Cram, 2010, p. 8). This approach is decolonizing in this study, as it allows the Turtle Mountain to collaborate during the duration of the research and how it may serve them in the future (i.e., secure funding for future summer programs).

Additionally, appreciative inquiry empowers its practitioners to explore innovative practice while being an agent of change by challenging the dominant power (Hung et al., 2018). This approach helped to address my conundrum of coding, as it allowed for critical discourse and social change. By allowing myself to become an “agent of change,” which related back to Sandy Grande’s (2000) views of red pedagogy in research by challenging the dominant society’s views of coding interview. The concept of appreciative inquiry supports learning and reflection in positive ways; however, appreciative inquiry has also been criticized for focusing on the positive experiences while failing to address gaps with the negative experiences (Hung et al., 2018). In reaction to this criticism, the positive approach to appreciative inquiry is to appreciate the negative experience by reframing it constructively and treating it as an opportunity to make improvements (Hung et al., 2018). Hung et al. (2018) concluded that the appreciative inquiry approach “shows the potential to address current gaps in knowledge to action” (p. 9). My experiences being “mixed blood” Metis/Michif were not always positive; however, they allowed me to reflect on how education can be approached through a multi-ethnic lens in order to approach cultural education positively for my own students. It also allowed me to acknowledge



that my own students might feel “othered” in the classroom and address possible ways to address that issue in the classroom.

The interview process of this study was influenced by the 4-D cycle of appreciative inquiry. The first phase (discovery allowed me to ask interview questions that focused on the positive aspects of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (i.e., How does this work?). This approach was to elicit responses from the participant group that was centered on what the Belcourt Youth Activities Program was doing right with their approach to health and wellness. The second phase of the cycle (dream) determined what does the program looked like in its implementation. The dream cycle produced the creation of the visual BYAP Education Model that was generated from participant interview responses. The third phase (design) examined what kind of relationships or actions best support the dream of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. Finally, the last phase (delivery) generated ideas for action and communicate BYAP’s accomplishments. Appreciative inquiry was helpful in my situation as it allows you to be an agent of change by allowing you to think of possible solutions to address identified gaps.

Additionally, the only way that I would feel comfortable with coding would be by using an Indigenous framework of analysis that utilizes a medicine wheel or “Sacred Hoop” in order to allow the interviews to remain unaltered and in their purest form. The purity of narrative or keeping a narrative in its intended form was priority as I was reminded of Gunn Allen’s (1991) principle of handling narratives with extreme and deliberate care in order to maintain their intended meaning. Eventually, I found inspiration was through the work of Dr. Collette Adamsen and her use of the concept of the medicine wheel in her dissertation. I grew up with the story of the “Sacred Hoop” or the Medicine Wheel. I have seen the Sacred Hoop in many different forms. It is related to nature, the four directions, and even health. The medicine wheel

(or “Sacred Hoop”) is a holistic approach to Indigenous health and wellness. The medicine wheel is a nonlinear model of human development and the beliefs represented in the medicine wheel fall into four equal realms: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual. These realms relate to Indigenous health areas. “The four realms are interconnected; therefore, an imbalance among the realms risks the health and well-being of the group and individuals” (Adamsen, 2018, p. 4). Using the conceptualization of the medicine wheel reflects the idea that if any of the health areas shift, there would be an imbalance—leading to a potential health risk. The goal is to remain balanced in the center of the wheel while honoring all aspects of one’s identity to ensure that one remains a healthy and balanced individual.

The medicine wheel or “Sacred Hoop” as an analytical tool for program evaluation also relates to appreciative inquiry. Azure (2013) is an Indigenous researcher who created a link between appreciative inquiry and the Sacred Hoop. Appreciative inquiry can be addressed in a theoretical model that emphasizes the use of the Medicine Wheel or “Sacred Hoop.” Azure (2013) discusses the themes are not in any numeric or quantifiable order in this type of model, but rather tell a story or demonstrate the Circle of Life. Azure (2013) argues that this tool connects to the idea that this holistic model can fit an appreciative inquiry as it does often focus on the positive; however, the findings can acknowledge the negative experiences of Indigenous people. Azure (2013) states that, “Not every influence that helped build these themes is positive. Mention of family influences can be through alcoholic tendencies that may have been negative, but probably ended up contributing to these participants in a positive manner” (p. 78). Azure (2013) uses appreciative inquiry in a meaningful way by connecting how the negative experiences of his participants can create positive outcomes (i.e., family influences of alcoholic tendencies can contribute positively to a person by serving as a reason to abstain from alcohol).

This relates to appreciative inquiry and how negative experiences can still have positive effects moving forward.

I also took inspiration from Beaudry's (2015) article discussing Christopher Mushquash, an Ojibway and a member of Pays Plat First Nation, who adapted the medicine wheel to reflect Indigenous health. In his adaptation, Mushquash (who is a clinical psychologist) relates each realm to mental health outcomes in Indigenous youth populations (Beaudry, 2015). Using Mushquash's concept of community learning within the medicine wheel, I started to shape my understanding of how to develop my own framework. The first step in developing my own framework would be to understand each realm in the medicine wheel as it relates to health and wellness. The mental learning (red) realm of the medicine wheel refers to the type of learning that uses procedures and protocols to teach a lesson. It emphasizes the importance of healthy *thinking*. The physical learning (yellow) realm of the medicine wheel refers to the community-based learning programs and financial support needed for the process of learning to be attainable. It emphasizes the importance of healthy *movement*. The emotional learning (black) realm of the medicine wheel refers to the aspect of learning that is learned through the process of empathy and active listening. It emphasizes the importance of relationships (especially with elders and advisors) and community-based learning. It emphasizes the importance of healthy *feelings*. The spiritual learning (white) realm of the medicine wheel refers to the part of learning that is taught through meaningful and relevant personal and cultural connections that often refers to cultural or spiritual leaders. It emphasizes the importance healthy *connections*.

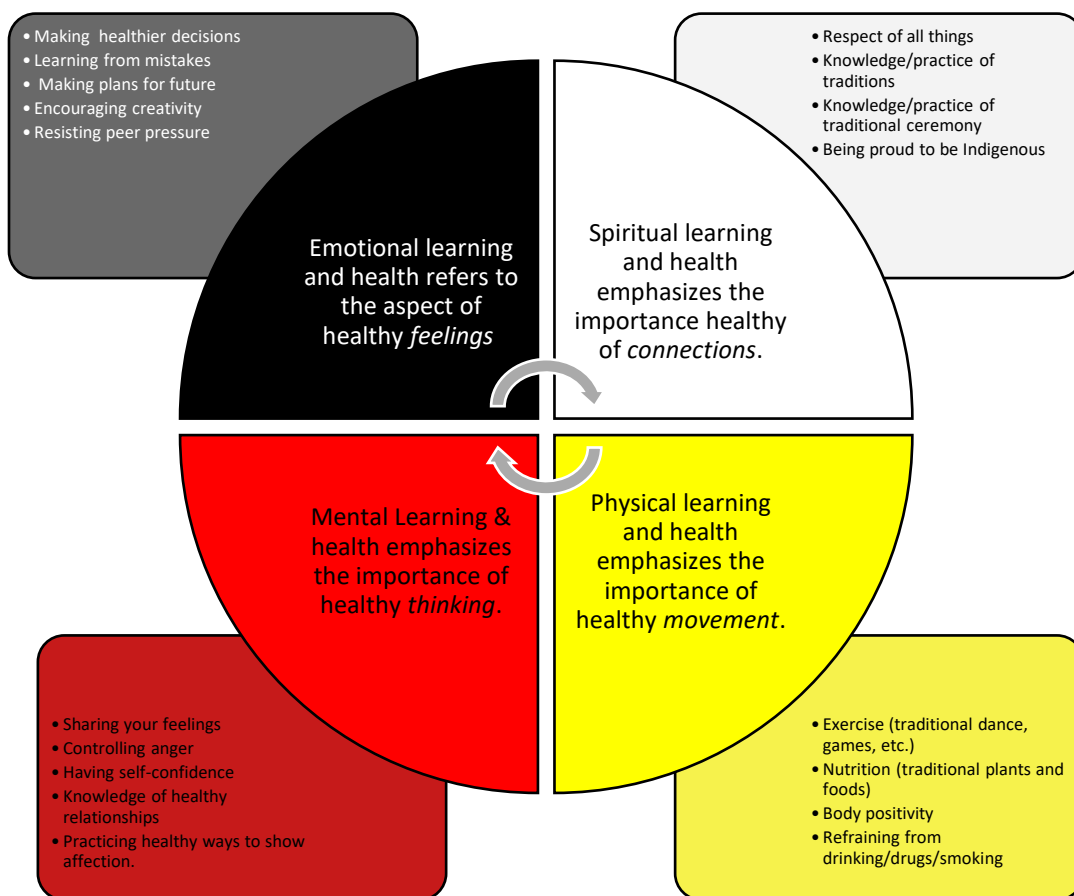
The framework I developed using the idea of community education as it relates to Indigenous health and wellness is demonstrated in Figure 2 below. All four realms have both culture and language emphasized throughout, as these two components serve as foundations in

the idea of Indigenous health and wellness. Each realm also provided possible lessons that would align with each realm—this helped me to code each statement into the proper realm by providing me with a basis of what types of lessons that I may see emerge from each realm. This served as a starting point to code, as it provided me with an idea of the types of educational lessons you may see to fit in each realm (not only the basic information of how the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual health realms are defined). On the side of each realm, I gave examples of how certain lesson topics can fit into each realm (i.e., being proud to be an Indigenous person can relate back to spiritual health in the idea that you have a connection with your culture). Does the statement emphasize thinking, movement, feelings, or connections? It is recognized that certain statements can be sorted into multiple groupings, which can also add to the possible balance/imbalance of health outcomes (i.e., Traditional dance can be categorized as movement, connections, and feelings. It is a form of exercise, promotes a creative outlet, as well as gives the practitioner a sense of connection with one's culture). One way to address this potential issue of using the medicine wheel as an analytical tool would be to examine the context in which these lessons are discussed. This was done through looking at the framework of the interviewee's main points. What were they emphasizing as they addressed each new lesson or point—were they talking about feelings, connections, thinking, or movement? The context of the statement or point was distributed in the analytical tool depending on which realm is listed of importance. When community educators discussed culture and being Metis, how were they relating it back to health? Where did it fit into the medicine wheel? When they discussed nutrition, were they discussing physical health or other realms? Does the program framework provide a sense of balance, as the medicine wheel suggests there to be within Indigenous health and wellness? Context was an integral part—not only with ensuring that the narrative not be

changed, but to make sure that it is sorted into the correct area of the tool. If an interviewee discussed traditional dance, what were they emphasizing? Are they discussing how it can be used for exercise or are they discussing the importance of connectivity to culture? This determined how each narrative would be sorted into the tool.

**Figure 2**

*Medicine Wheel for Health and Wellness*



For instance, one participant stated “They have someone from our community come in to show them how to make different traditional foods and they get to enjoy it after they cook it. It reminds me of family meals and cooking with your family.” This quote discusses cooking and nutrition, but instead of physical health, they are emphasizing family and relationships, so it was

sorted into the red realm. Another participant stated, "...it just brings them a sense of community. You know, it makes those connections. It helps them find maybe a mentor or someone that [they] can confide in. It is kind of like when I look at [it] is it almost like a big sister big brother type thing." Since this quote specifically discusses the importance of healthy connections, it was also sorted into the red realm. The context of each quote was vital in the coding process, as this was the factor that was closely examined to determine which realm a specific quote would be sorted into—context demonstrated the emphasis of the participant. The medicine wheel was then analyzed as a whole to identify key themes. Once each interview and online survey were added to the sorting tool, they were divided by participant role and years of service to analyze separately. This was to determine if role and/or years of service had any influence in how a participant responded to certain questions. Later in the results section, I will refer to roles and/or years of service only when/if this influenced participant responses.

Using the analytical tool created, I created a sorting matrix. Each matrix listed the research question and the interview questions that were linked to that question. The interviews were then sorted into the matrix. Interview commentary about experiences not associated with identity or Indigenous wellness were unable to be sorted into the matrix, such as experiences often associated with employment; however, it will be used when referring to a specific quote in order to provide the results within its original context. Once data is sorted into each realm using the context and emphasis of each quote, themes are identified from the medicine wheel. I will then recreate the medicine wheel model with the identified themes in the results section. The use of the medicine wheel allows me to use an Indigenous inquiry with the information and allow me to learn if there is imbalance among the realms which would risk the health and well-being of

program participants. If names were used during this process, they were omitted from the transcription and replaced with a place marker i.e. [guest name].

If themes emerge in all four sections, it will determine a balance in the health and wellness of Belcourt Youth Activities Program. However, if only 1-3 realms are highlighted, this would show imbalance within the camp's approach to health and wellness education. Using appreciative inquiry would still allow us to determine how we might be able to address these issues moving forward in order to correct the imbalance of the medicine wheel.

### **Conclusions**

The point of research is to gain better understanding and perspectives of what we are studying. Gathering narrative is beneficial for tribes, so there is a record of these stories for younger generations to come; however, if misused by the broader populations, the group is exposed to additional risks. If we hold this statement true, we must acknowledge that the data and research conducted belongs to the Indigenous population being studied. Many Indigenous researchers agree that Indigenous research—no matter what subject area—is conducted to benefit Indigenous populations. This is to protect the culture and the people who are being studied.

In addition, the primary goal of the Institutional Review Board of any institution is to protect human subject rights, especially those of vulnerable populations (i.e., Indigenous Peoples. “Researchers have often been perceived as doing research *on*, not *with* Indigenous people, with little regard to local cultural protocols and languages and without seeking consent from communities” (Fitzpatrick et al., 2016, p. 1). We can think of IRB as a rocky road that was paved with the best intentions when used alone, however it is critical that the IRB collaborates with tribal communities in order to ensure the three ethical principles be honored. The major

difference between both the tribal IRB and institutional IRB are that the tribal IRB is already decolonized and have specific cultural advisors that offer their expertise when working with Indigenous communities. Indigenous people have the right to share their voice on how they believe research should be conducted and treated when participating in a study that protects the integrity of the tribe, the culture, and the people (respect for persons). According to Lambert (2014), "...a decolonized research process, with outcomes that provide value to a community, also help build the capacity of those communities to conduct their own research and to develop relationships with institutions and agencies for future collaborative research efforts" (p. 62). This collaboration is a necessary step in order to approach research with Indigenous communities with the utmost sensitivity and care.

Additionally, when approaching Indigenous research with deliberate care, we must also acknowledge that interview is providing narrative. Oral narratives are thought to teach younger generations numerous cultural values and lessons that the tribe believes can be beneficial to a person's successes in the community, especially in Indigenous communities. "We would not survive without stories. Stories can tell us how to relate in a community and be part of a community" (Lambert, 2014, p. 30). Essentially, Indigenous interview is providing stories through our oral tradition. We, as researchers, must understand that historically these stories have been misinterpreted by the broader populations (non-Indigenous populations) and have lost the overall cultural values of the Indigenous tribe—which is why the tribe fights to protect this information.

As a result, when using Indigenous narrative, I chose to use the medicine wheel as my analytical tool. It is using an Indigenous concept of health to code narrative. As the medicine wheel is already related to health, it would make sense to use this as a framework for narrative



about Indigenous health. I directly quote from the participant's interview and analyze for similar responses in the online survey/interview, so the narrative cannot be misinterpreted. Narratives are categorized into a specific segment of the medicine wheel in relation to what is being said (are they making connections with spiritual health, physical health, emotional health, or mental health). The entire quote is examined within its context in order to conclude which segment they are referring to in the medicine wheel, thus the narrative will not be what Gunn Allen (1991) describes as "tampered with." It is my hope that my research helps to contribute to that conversation and assists to strengthen the relationship between institution and Indigenous community for future research collaboration.

## **CHAPTER IV. RESULTS**

The purpose of this research study was an attempt to better understand a multi-ethnic educational model in Indigenous health educational program (formally known as the Belcourt Youth Activities Program or BYAP). This study explored a specific multi-ethnic teaching model by examining BYAP, which is a health education initiative that considers multiple area cultures within its program curriculum. Throughout the research process, health educators' perceptions were analyzed using the traditional medicine wheel as an analytical tool. As a former employee of the program, this study helped me explore perceptions other than my own to help better understand the BYAP program's unique approach to education, how Indigenous health educators viewed the implementation of the program, and whether the educators believed this was an effective form of health and wellness education.

### **Introduction**

As I begin the results section of this dissertation, I begin with the findings of the tribal consultation process, as it was important to highlight the views specific to identity and how it shaped my views of my own identity. These views helped to shape how I approached this study and analysis, as I became more aware of my own biases of my tribe and the community. This chapter also identifies and provides the themes collected through a series of interviews and online surveys along with supporting evidence by utilizing direct quotes from the interviews and surveys provided. The data were examined by analyzing each quote to sort into the coding tool created. The tool used for this analysis was a chart created with each of the interview questions in the first column with the categories of each of the four medicine wheel realms on the top. When participants discussed aspects of identity and health, context was used to determine which of the four realms the quotations would be sorted into within the chart. As stated in the previous

chapter, it was essential to provide direct quotes and context for those quotes, so a participant's narrative remained in its purest form. This analysis was crucial in protecting the narrative of each participant, so it could not be misused in this study. If a quote was used, the context was brought into the quote for interpretation purposes. Once each Zoom interview and online survey was sorted into their appropriate medicine wheel realm, themes were identified using the four realms they were categorized.

In addition to this analysis, I created the teaching model of BYAP using the narratives provided by Indigenous wellness educators in order to understand how the BYAP approached health and wellness education. It was important to understand the specific approach they took to wellness education to determine how they were unique and to make sure that it was culturally sustaining. The first set of research questions were used to help develop this educational model:

- (1) How is culture used as medicine in a Metis youth sports program?
- (2) How is use of medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators?
- (3) What health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result of culture used as medicine in the program?

The identified teaching model was also used to help demonstrate the decolonized approach to Indigenous wellness education of the BYAP, which will also be referred to throughout this chapter.

### **Tribal Nations Research Group Consultation**

Indigenous populations are continuously struggling to survive the assault on their culture (Chilisa, 2012), which makes the process of tribal consultation in research an important step. The process of decolonized efforts in Indigenous research is not only an effort to survive an assault on culture, but to ensure that this research is conducted in a way that benefits the tribe

and is culturally sensitive. In order to decolonize my own efforts, tribal consultation was an additional (but necessary) step to ensure that I was culturally sensitive to the research participant group and gave back to my community in a way that could benefit them.

Prior to tribal consultation, it was important to gain permission from Shane Martin and the Turtle Mountain Community School to study this population due to their relationship to the school. Since the sample population was from BYAP associated with the Turtle Mountain Community School (TMCS), it was important to gain their partnership throughout the research process. Permission was given to the researcher by Dr. Shane Martin, TMCS Athletic Director and BYAP Administrator. Before the initial protocol was submitted, Dr. Martin collaborated with me regarding this project on goals of the research, research questions, instruments, and how to contact study participants. This feedback was used in the initial and secondary IRB submissions. A letter was submitted with this protocol by Dr. Martin to demonstrate this partnership to the tribal research group.

In order to obtain tribal research approval, you must first gain your institutional approval, so my initial protocol was submitted to NDSU for approval as a first step. The Tribal Nations Research Group is secondary; when they supply their feedback to your original protocol, you must edit for cultural sensitivity, then submit your institutional protocol for amendments after approval from the tribe. Once received, this information is then resubmitted to your institution (in my case, NDSU) for a third round of IRB submissions for approval. The following is an amendment chart that states the feedback from the Tribal Nations Research Group along with how it was addressed by the researcher to the research group:

**Table 1***Amendments Chart with the Tribal Nations Research Group*

| <b>Tribal IRB Feedback</b>  | <b>How it was addressed</b>   |
|---|---|
| Define “Multi-ethnic Indigenous Identity”   | ‘Multi-ethnic’ refers to relating to multiple cultural traditions. According to the United Nations, “Indigenous Peoples” is a term used to describe “Indigenous communities, peoples and nations...having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, and consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing on those territories, or parts of them” (United Nations, 1992, p. 2). Identity refers to how a person identifies.   |
| ‘Indigenous’ can be any ethnic group throughout the world.  | That is true, this study will focus on Indigenous People of the Turtle Mountain Reservation. Researcher has added the supporting commentary by the United Nations to use the term ‘Indigenous’ vs ‘Native’  |
| What ‘Sacred Hoops’ exactly are you referring to that in being ‘jumped’ through– I do not see the term mentioned anywhere in your documents.  | This is a working title, which can change after the data is collected and analyzed, so I appreciate this question. “Sacred Hoops” is another term for the Medicine Wheel. As a “mixed blood” tribal member, I am usually “othered” in academia. We have hurdles to ‘jump’ through that others do not. This is what I am referring to in my title. This term is briefly described in the attached analytical tool.   |
| What specifically was BYAP doing that was “taking a culturally sustaining approach to education, which is a multi-ethnic approach (in this case, Metis)” A specific education program?                            | The BYAP program is unique in its approach to education in the sense of using multicultural approaches to students in the area. The area is diverse (people self-identify using many different terms; for example, Ojibwe, Anishinaabe, Cree, Metis/Michif, and French-Canadian, to name a few). The program acknowledges this diversity and invites lecturers from the community that are experts in different aspects of the culture (i.e., Inviting area musicians to discuss the traditional drum and inviting others to discuss traditional Metis fiddle.)   |
| Why is the author using only Metis? Turtle Mountain cultural identity is both Michif and Ojibwe, which is even more prevalent in the last few decades than ever before.   | Good point. My full proposal has a fuller discussion of terms used. For this revision of my IRB proposal, I have changed it to add the term “Anishinaabe” in order to include the Ojibwe population. The term Anishinaabe is translated as “an Ojibwe” in the Ojibwe People’s Dictionary (2020). If the reviewers have other suggestions about terminology that should be used, I am open to hearing them.  |
| Otherwise the author would have to single out folks that only identify with Michif which is a huge divisive issue in the Turtle Mountains.  | My intention is not to single out Michif people. I have added a question to find out each participant’s preferred identity term. I will then use their preferred term.  |
| The board recommend simply using the term Native.   | Researcher has changed the term ‘Indigenous’ to ‘Native’ by request of the IRB committee.   |
| “Culture used as Medicine”, again, what does this mean? The board members do not see that anywhere in your documents, or how you are going to research that with your methodology.                                | Despite many definitions of culture, researchers fail to recognize that “for many [Indigenous] individuals’ culture cannot be defined on its own, as a separate entity, but instead culture is life itself—an all-encompassing concept. As a result, culture may have an impact on [Indigenous] individuals” (p 63). In order for the wounds created by historical trauma to heal, it is suggested that the Indigenous population must connect with their culture, since it is viewed as medicine that possesses protective and therapeutic power that promotes resilience (Bassett et al., 2012). This is the research that the concept of “culture as medicine” is based upon—that culture helps Indigenous People to heal. |
|   | This has been added to explain the concept in the IRB documents.  |
| Again, we are puzzled by the single use of the term Metis/Michif, exclusive of Ojibwe.  | This has been changed to add the term “Anishinaabe” in order to include the Ojibwe population.  |
| The author states that BYAP had one day a week devoted to Metis nutrition – I have never heard of such a thing being taught – is it generally traditional Indigenous nutrition – what exactly is Metis nutrition? | Question was reworded to read that one day a week is devoted to traditional nutrition—which is not leading the participant to a specific answer and is open to their interpretation of ‘traditional’.   |

**Table 1.** *Amendments Chart with the Tribal Nations Research Group (continued)*

| <b>Tribal IRB Feedback</b>   | <b>How it was addressed</b>   |
|--|---|
| I dislike the last question of your survey questions. It is negative – can you reword the question to ask something such as how proud they are of their culture. The second part of the question is a difficult one to answer – the author would have to provide them with a definition of ‘decolonization.’ | Question was reworded to say: If we define ‘decolonize’ as ‘to go back to your roots’ as an Indigenous person (Moore & Taylor, 2014, para. 1), what is the relationship between specific practices in this program (BYAP) and decolonization?   |
| Whose medicine wheel is being used– cite please. Medicine wheels are not specific to Metis culture, which mostly identifies with Catholic religion.  | Citation was added—researcher (Johnson) developed this tool based from inspiration from Christopher Mushquash, an Ojibway and a member of Pays Plat First Nation, who adapted the medicine wheel to reflect Indigenous health (Beauadry, 2015). The medicine wheel (or “Sacred Hoop”) is a holistic approach to Indigenous health and wellness. It is considered a universal symbol among First Nations people that represents health and healing. This was also mentioned in the updated analytical tool.  |
| Define these terms: “culturally sustaining approach to education, which is a multi-ethnic approach/health outcomes as a result (of) culture used as medicine. Can you expand on how you will extrapolate “Culture used as Medicine.”   | According to Paris (2012), culturally sustaining pedagogy is a term that supports the ever-changing ideas of heritage and community, which thereby aims to also support the value of multi-ethnic and multilingual students in the present and future (p. 93).<br><br>Despite many definitions of culture, researchers fail to recognize that “for many [Indigenous] individuals’ culture cannot be defined on its own, as a separate entity, but instead culture is life itself—an all-encompassing concept. As a result, culture may have an impact on [Indigenous] individuals” (p 63). In order for the wounds created by historical trauma to heal, it is suggested that the Indigenous population must connect with their culture, since it is viewed as medicine that possesses protective and therapeutic power that promotes resilience (Bassett et al., 2012). This is the research that the concept of “culture as medicine” is based upon—that culture helps Indigenous People to heal.   |
| Again, here the author mentions that participants will interview “about your experiences participating as a Metis health educator” Some may identify as only Metis, yet, others will identify as Ojibwe. The singular use of Metis is troublesome.   | This has been changed to read as “multicultural health educator” in order to include all aspects of culture, which will vary based on the self-identifying term chosen by the participant.  |
| The author of this IRB needs to understand more about the history of the Turtle Mt. reservation, both Michif and Ojibwe. Also needs to learn more about the culture and cultural sensitivity.  | Like Anishinaabe researcher Susan Bebonang (2008), I expect to learn more about myself and my culture from conducting this study. When Indigenous people research their home communities, there are many challenges because of the diverse context, one’s own identity in the research, and managing multiple perspectives. In my full proposal (89 pages), I have explored many of these terms and concepts more fully. The full proposal was successfully defended in front of my committee, which includes Indigenous members, and I have undertaken a major revision of it since then as my reading, thinking, and learning continue to develop. I would be happy to share my full proposal with the board, if it would be useful. Although this comment was difficult for me to hear, I have used the advice within it to improve my protocol. I added a question to my questionnaire for self-identifying terms to use for each individual. I changed terminology to fit the needs of the area and added explanation/definitions in order to make the protocol clearer in some areas. |
| Somewhere in your documents you used the terms "Indigenous and French-Canadian" I think she may have been still trying to refer to Michifs.  | This has been changed to read as “Anishinaabe, Cree, and French-Canadian”, which is more inclusive of the diverse population of the area.   |

This amendments chart was submitted with the necessary edits to the Tribal Nations Research Group for further review. Once these amendments were made to the tribal consultation group, tribal IRB approval was granted. These amendments were also sent over to the North Dakota State University IRB for a third review, along with the signed Tribal Nations Research Group approval letter.

This was really an eye-opening experience for me. Although I gave clarification in my research proposal, it made me realize that someone who was unfamiliar with my work would need further clarification of some of the terms and decisions that I made throughout my study. I also believe it is important that I had to realize my own bias in the use of terms. Even though I was from the area and identified as Metis, this did not mean that someone else would identify the same. This was essentially what I was trying to highlight in the study—that the area was in fact multicultural and there were so many different identities and backgrounds. However, I failed to recognize that in my original protocol terminology. It was a reminder to be mindful of the cultural sensitivity in the terminology—so the way this was addressed was through having the participant self-identify their cultural term to be used for their identity. If I truly wanted to be culturally sensitive, this seemed like the best way to respect the multiple ways that people could describe themselves in the area. This feedback was important for me to hear in order to improve my protocol in order to be culturally sensitive (and decolonized), but it also helped me to know a little more about myself as a researcher. My own unconscious bias had shown itself in the terminology, but it was important that I recognize this in order to understand the multiple perspectives in my own community.

After gaining approval from both the tribal and institution IRB, I was able to begin the process of data collection. Using the instrument of the questionnaire and interview questions,

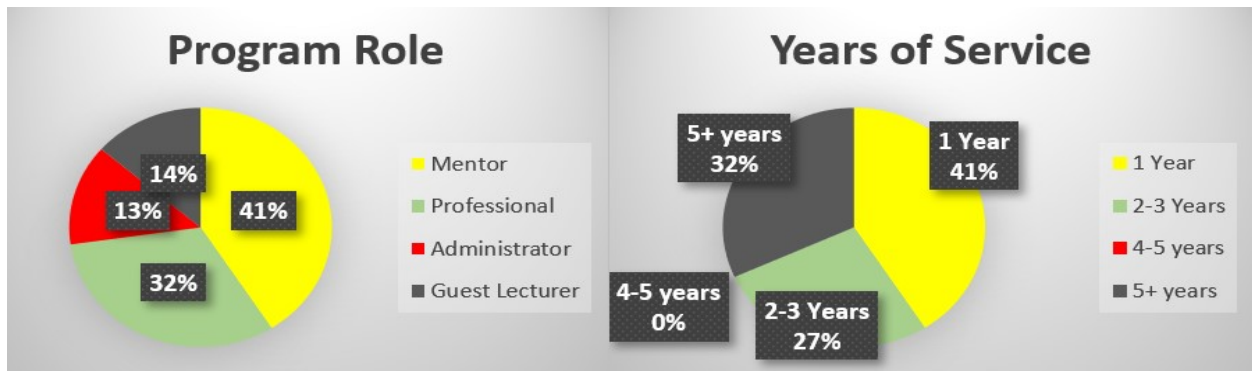
research participants provided information in relation to their experiences as employees and/or guest lecturers for the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. The following are the results gathered from their provided responses.

### Questionnaire Results

Prior to beginning the interview, participants completed the required questionnaire with the following three questions: (1) How long have you worked with the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP)? (2) What is your role with the program? (3) What is your preferred term for your cultural identity? In the graph below, we can see that 41% of the 22 participants were Mentors. Mentors take students from class to class, but do not lead the class itself. They help manage behavior and are encouraged to participate with the students. Professionals made up 32%, which is the role of a teacher/leader for the various classes offered by the camp.

**Figure 3**

*Side by Side View of Participant Demographic Data*



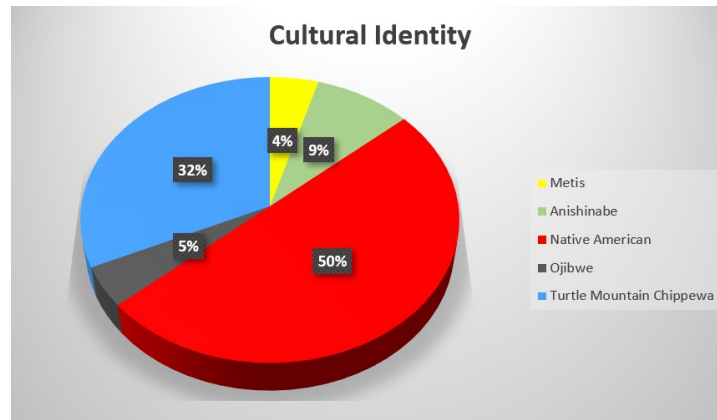
Guest Lecturers comprised 14% of respondents who came for a specific presentation to the culture class in BYAP, and 13% of respondents were camp administrators who oversee the overall working of the camp. In addition to their role in the camp, participants were asked about their years of service. The primary response to this question revealed that almost half (41%) of respondents were in their first year of working the program. Precisely 27% estimated that they



were with the BYAP program for two years with no participants revealing a time span of 3-4 years. Participants who worked with the program for 5 years or longer were the second most prominent group (32%) of the sample.

#### Figure 4

##### *Self-Disclosed Cultural Identity Terms*



The last question of the demographic questionnaire, asking how participants self-identified, was to honor the many conflicting identities within the local area (although many identities are interrelated and are not conflicting), since there are multiple cultures present in the Turtle Mountain area. Allowing participants to self-identify was an essential step in this study to show respect and to recognize the preferred cultural term of each participant in the study. By not allowing Indigenous populations to label themselves, it supports the dominant discourse, which demonstrates that Indigenous people are continuously affected by colonialism. Information for self-identified terms were gathered through a short answer response, as not to steer participants to a specific answer.

Participants were able to put one or multiple terms in the short answer space (i.e., participants who self-identified as both “Native American” [which can reflect multiple tribal affiliations] and “Turtle Mountain Chippewa” in their responses). If participants identified as

more than one term, both terms were recorded for the purpose of this study. Allowing participants in this study to choose how they self-identify was also a decolonized research approach, as it allows Indigenous populations to take control of their terms and uses Indigenous voices to describe themselves rather than a survey option that often limits how a person can self-identify. The most frequent of responses to this self-disclosed cultural identity term question was the all-encompassing term of “Native American” by half of the participant group. “Turtle Mountain Chippewa” was the second most prominent term of this sample group with 32% of respondents. Other disclosed preferred terms by the sample group were Anishinaabe (9%), Ojibwe (5%), and Metis (4%).

The self-identified terms were also looked at in relation to point of view in relationship with the other cultural identities present in the area. According to Fiola (2015), I needed to first recognize that “it is important to keep in mind that, historically (and contemporarily), not everyone with Indigenous and European blood would automatically be considered ‘Metis’” (p. 16). This relates to the idea of culture touching many parts of lives, which includes the food, clothing, individual and family activities, music, and spirituality—it goes far beyond the blood running through your veins. One participant stated, “... Metis is the culture on our reservation, resulting out of the mixture of Frenchmen and Ojibway women marrying and having children, so the cultures have collided ...and they have both parts of the culture within them, which makes it unique and different than the Ojibwe culture...”

When participants were asked about what they think of when they hear about Metis culture, there were a variety of responses, but most responses included references to Metis jigging, fiddle music, and local culture. One participant stated,

What comes to mind is the fact that, like I said, it makes our tribe unique and that it adds more culture to who we are, and we are teaching who we are. Usually these things include fiddling, jigging, getting together...just things of that sort in the Michif language. Metis language [Metis and Michif being the same language]...there is French in it, mixed with French, Anishinaabe, and Ojibwe.

This participant emphasized that the Metis aspect of their culture is “unique” and associated it with music, dance, and language. They also emphasized how the culture is unique, because it merges so many different cultures into one distinct language and tradition. Some of the interview participants discussed how even though they might not identify with Metis culture themselves, they recognized the fact that this culture was present in their own area. This includes the following participant quote,

... I was brought [up], you know, like I said, Anishinaabe Ojibwe... I had very limited knowledge of the Metis culture...we have to respect that element of our culture here because there's so many people that ... are Metis...you have your Metis, you have your Anishinaabe. Maybe you have your Ojibwe people and I do not want to say you are divided, but you have those two, you know, prominent groups here. And we felt that we needed to recognize and respect that, uh, portion of our culture here. So we agree that, you know, we need to not only teach the Anishinaabe way, but we also have to, you know, give that knowledge to our children that yes, there is Metis culture here also...So we brought in those presenters that...had...the knowledge of the Metis culture, as well as Anishinaabe.

The participant in the above quote was one of three cultural educators in the school system who helped form the cultural curriculum for the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. This statement

expresses how, despite identifying as Anishinaabe/Ojibwe, that they considered all possible cultural identities for the local area. This consideration for all possible cultural identities informed their choices on who to bring in from the area to help teach the children. The Belcourt Youth Activities Program is unique in its approach to education as it takes multiple area cultures into consideration when building their curriculum.

### **The BYAP Education Model**

After completing the Zoom interview and online survey process, narratives provided in both interview and survey were examined similarly by analyzing each quote of the methods and lessons of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP). Transcriptions of both interview and online survey were created, then sorted into the corresponding medicine wheel realms using context. Post-colonialism was the primary framework of analysis, which allows analysis to take place through a double consciousness (an internalized conflict of a colonized group/individual by oppressive society). The sorting of narrative into the medicine wheel tool allowed me to recognize recurring images and themes to develop a visual depiction of the educational model unique to the program.

Participants in this study emphasized the importance of passing down the culture from elders to the youth as an important step in cultural preservation. An example of cultural revival before it is lost forever was provided in the following interview quote,

I have met some amazing people, you know that are that we are elders that were guest speakers that came in [to present at BYAP] ... and they are not here anymore, and they are no longer here on earth. And so we have, you know, kept a like, I do not want to say a library, but ... in a folder of some sort of like all the teachings that we taught, you know, our that they taught like ... your grandfather, Eddie King being guest speakers and

talking their stories. And then for us to be able to just sit there and learn right with the kids, you know, because you know, I'm a person that do not know everything. And I'm always up for learning.

As elders pass on to the next world, they often take their stories and lessons with them. In this example quote, the participant acknowledges that some guest speakers over the years are no longer with us (like my grandfather). It is also stated that in order to protect the lessons of the former guest speakers that have passed on, BYAP keeps a file “library” or “folder” so even the educators can learn along with the students. The co-learning principle of culturally sustaining pedagogy allows educators to continue to grow and learn with their students, which is also something that the above quote demonstrates.

In order to address the potential issue of maintaining spiritual health and confidence in the future, the Belcourt Youth Activities Program utilizes community members (many tribal elders) to come in to share their expertise with the younger generation. An example of this teaching approach was stated,

We have a lot of speakers. And when you know, in our culture, elders and storytelling [is] our biggest learning device, that's how everything was handed down is by story. You do not see a lot of written stuff now. Now you might be seeing more written, but it was always oral traditions, um, storytelling... I mean, that's what you had the storyteller, to keep the traditions alive.

Oral storytelling using tribal elders is not unique in tribal communities, as this a common Indigenous educational method. There are even theories that this traditional education method related to the health of our elders. “Elders often descended into despair, and youth grew up with no connections. The medicine wheel had been broken” (Ross, 2014, p. 49). It is for these

reasons, that a wellness program would take the lessons of our elders to pass down to our children. It is a means of survival and health. When speaking of tribal elders coming in to help teach students, one research participant stated:

The way it is [BYAP] mainly set up is to bring in tribal elders and community members with an area of expertise in our local culture. Traditional music brings in local musicians to teach students. The local fishing club comes in to talk with students about traditional fishing and there are so many other community members that are happy to come to share their area with students. It seems like more of a community effort than a singular person leading the class.

Here we see the common theme of community when referencing bringing in tribal elders. The “community effort” referred to by the participant is characteristic of a traditional Indigenous education concept that emphasizes the importance of community-based education. When taking this approach to education, it teaches using storytelling, listening to elders, and creating relationships with our tribal elders to carry on our traditions as Indigenous people. Now that the educational model has been described, I turn my attention to the themes reflected in the medicine wheel.

### **Red Realm Themes**

The red realm is the mental learning realm of the medicine wheel, which refers to the type of learning that uses procedures and protocols to teach a lesson to emphasize the importance of healthy *thinking*. One research participant in this study stated, “... it most definitely has an effect on their mental ... health. Many students share stories of their families as a lesson relates to them and I think that this is important for their social-emotional well-being.” This participant emphasized healthy thinking (by referring to social-emotional well-being) and tied it to family

values. The importance of relationships was a predominant theme in the red realm, since family was said to influence if a student connected with a lesson. Another research participant added, "... it [BYAP Culture Class] reminds them of home..... It is that connectedness with their community and their home. A connectedness with family and home influences students' actions after a lesson (i.e., by sharing stories with or about their families as they relate to a lesson).

Providing a sense of community to students was emphasized as well as playing an active role in the community (in this example, understanding culture related to making community members proud).

I like the sense of community that BYAP brings because when kids are there for a lot .... that entire time you are with your community members, your friends, and they are also making friends with their mentors and there. And it just brings them a sense of community. You know, it makes those connections...It helps them find maybe a mentor or someone that can confide in....

In addition to the emphasis on community, many participants expressed how BYAP's integration of community members as cultural liaisons was an important step in their educational model (i.e., finding a member of the community to talk to and confide in). Bringing elders to talk to students bridged the relationships between students and community members, an example of community-based learning. Indigenous communities that use community-based learning often relate it back to intergenerational transmission of knowledge and teach younger generations to carry on the legacy of the tribe and its people.

After conducting my analysis of the online surveys, "teamwork" was a common theme that fit under the red realm (since it emphasizes relationships). "Teamwork" as a response was one of the few where participant role influenced participant responses. The Professional leaders

of sports activities expressed in the survey that students being able to learn how to be able to function within a team and to be a good team player was important for student outcomes. This was not a surprise, given the sports-centered curriculum. A surprising finding was rather than the connections with sports activity (physical realm), professional leaders of sports activities expressed positive peer interaction as the primary student outcome (mental realm). Despite being an exercise and sports activity, building healthy relationships with each other was deemed of higher importance. One professional leader stated, "...it gets kids... out... interacting with each other, learning about teamwork, being respectful of each other..." Basically, this professional is saying that teamwork is important, but being able to be part of a sports team related to peer interaction, as well as a reference to the Seven Teachings of respect. Being able to create, strengthen, and bridge relationships between students, family, adults, and community members were highlighted by study participants throughout the red realm.

### **Yellow Realm Themes**

The yellow realm is the physical learning realm of the medicine wheel that refers to the community-based learning that emphasizes the importance of healthy *movement*. Many participants expressed the need for finding a balance between healthy nutrition and physical activity. Some interview participants related this balance back to our history of Indigenous people. One participant viewed this history as "... back in the day our people had the basic nutrition... our people had very, very healthy diets...getting deer or buffalo..." This is the basic knowledge expressed in the interviews regarding traditional nutrition.

Other study interviewees also emphasized the belief of needing traditional knowledge of nutrition in order to regain the healthier lifestyles of our ancestors. One participant expressed the importance of our ancestors using what they had to cook healthy food options.



Well...it teaches us how to cook. I believe with what we have and what they had back then. They had very little ingredients, I think sometimes. And they made really good food that kept you energized. Um, you know, carbohydrates, kept you [going] because you were busy... They [our ancestors] were always busy. They are gardening, hunting, fishing, doing something physically. So I believe it is this all kind of why they ate the way... they did... with a sport athlete. You want to keep energized. You want to be healthy. There's always vegetables in there, you know? And we raise our own vegetables. You know, sometimes no fried breading, that's best for you. That's a carbohydrate, which gives you energy.”

In other words, this participant expressed how food relates back to the production of energy, which relates back to needing that energy for physical activity. Our bodies need enough energy to keep moving efficiently, just like a car needs gas to run. This participant expressed that the relationship between healthy eating and active lifestyles are deemed of importance to them. Many interviewees said nutritional knowledge is important and being able to burn off that energy derived from diet and exercise. Another research participant stated, “... nutrition is a big part of being healthy and staying healthy and being active.” This expresses how diet and nutrition were a component of teaching students healthy lifestyle choices; however, it is also important to point out the importance of balance, as many of the participants in this study expressed that there is not only a need for basic knowledge of traditional diets—but also balancing that with physical activity.

In addition to finding a balance between nutrition and physical activity, another common theme in the yellow realm was land-based learning, which encourages a mutual respect centered on Indigenous relationships with coexisting with the land. One participant stated, “... the

ingredients that were used as part of the recipes were more natural ingredients. Things like that you could get off the land, ... ready to use like berries... there was a dish like that [that] had deer meat....” The traditional means of hunting, trapping, and fishing practices within their traditional framework [minimal waste] is a type of intergenerational land-based learning (Arellano, Friis, & Stuart, 2019). Interviews highlighted living off the land and learning to use natural ingredients that you could “get off the land.” In addition to this participant discussing “living off the land,” another participant added,

... it gives them an idea off how to stay healthy with eating our types of foods. ...you could make...some kind of stews out of anything you catch. You could make deer meat...you find...in the wilderness, ... we had learned to about eating like some types of, like birch barks, like there's certain parts of it and it ... helps the kids learn that they are able to stay healthy while still eating good food...

Both quotes emphasis learning to live off the land and the wilderness. This focus on the land and local wildlife reinforces the principles of intergenerational learning in that learning to coexist with the land in its current state is knowledge shared by previous generations.

Health educators in this study emphasized the importance of learning from our land, like in the quote above. It was natural for them to relate learning healthy eating habits and physical activities with the cultural traditions and the specific area. It was important for them to relate finding a balance between nutrition and physical activity in relation to generations before us (like the quote that mentions that “they” [our ancestors] used what they had “back then” in order to provide food to their family).

I guess I had to understand the times, you know, like the times we are talking about were rough back then and they have to eat a lot of fat, you know, to keep that whatever fat,

because who knows when they are going to eat again? You know, and it is like that, especially in the wintertime. I read a little obituary on my great auntie and how my grandpa had to take care of his brothers and sisters when they were 12 or when he was 12. And they had to kill birds, you know, and live off of birds. And they keep the fat from grease and put grease on their lips, so when the Child Protection Services would come over, it would look like they ate, you know, But, I mean, but in the wintertime and [food] got really scarce.

Moreover, land-based learning strategies were paired with health-related disease and obesity prevention. When discussing obesity prevention, one participant stated, “It [BYAP] helps with... that obesity you could see that in the community .... it helps. ... [learn] not have so much junk food ...” One research participant stated their views on health and obesity prevention in the following statement,

... educating our youth with... wellness and taking care of ourselves. Because we have, you know, that genetic sickness. You know of diabetes, high blood pressure, those things there. ... very important to our youth that you know, Get out. Be active. Stay active. You know, it is going to help you later on in life.”

Prevention efforts are important among Indigenous populations, as we do have high transmission rates with genetic illnesses such as diabetes (Adamsen (2018) discusses the fact that Indigenous populations are 177 percent more likely to be diagnosed with diabetes mellitus compared to those who are non-Indigenous). The best way to combat that is for youth to learn healthy activities and lifestyle measures in order to help combat those illnesses. Prevention measures may not be viewed as a reactive approach to Indigenous health, but it is a proactive approach to it. Finding a balance in diet and exercise were ultimately related back to the disease and obesity

prevention efforts of the tribe. The goal of the program was that doing so would help area youth combat these health problems and develop healthy lifestyle habits over time.

### **White Realm Themes**

The white realm is the spiritual learning realm of the medicine wheel that refers to the part of learning that is taught through meaningful and relevant personal and cultural connections that emphasizes the importance healthy *connections*. This realm was the most prominent of all four medicine wheel realms in relation to student health. The prominence of this realm is likely because this realm relates to showing pride in your own cultural background and having traditional knowledge. When asked why a sports program includes cultural elements, there were a variety of answers. One participant stated that they included culture in their program to provide students with “... a view of their background and where they come from...” In other words, this participant is saying that students needed to know where they came from and their history. This knowledge of background and history is important in knowing who you are—it helps form your identity.

In addition to knowledge of the past, participants expressed how our history influences our present. An example of how history influences our present was expressed by one participant as they discussed the importance of cultural knowledge, “So our generations know where we come from and where the ... the past built on the present. So they kind of [know] where they come from and build upon it...” when discussing why students learn about culture in relation to their health.

In addition to knowing where we come from and having a basic cultural knowledge of Indigenous traditions, it was also stressed throughout many interviews that it was important for students to connect with their culture and have a healthy outlook on who they are as Indigenous

people. As one research participant states, one of the reasons why they stress the importance of culture in relation to health is to teach students "... to... have an identity. So, the students have an identity of who they are. .... to be proud of who you are." This expresses the importance of knowing who you are, where you come from, and to be proud of those things. Participants in this study expressed that they were proud of who they were, as Indigenous health and wellness educators, but they also related this back to the notion of identity. Overall health relates back to an individual's identity and how important it is to understand who we are as Indigenous people. Another participant expressed the following:

I feel like [teaching culture is] very important...not only just because of the state where our reservation is at now with the students losing that cultural identity, but I feel that it plays a role in everyday life and has a connection to health and wellness. If you are from the reservation, you grow up in school learning that a lot of the cultural teachings are very crucial in everyday life—like the Seven Teachings you live by them every single day and those 7 teachings tie into your health and wellness. You have to have those certain teachings in order to be healthy and to feel good about yourself... What better way to do that then what your ancestors grew up doing and knowing and living every single day. And I think through that it is definitely an effort and a help to bring some of our cultural identity back because we have lost that due to just the history of our reservation and what happened throughout the years...it is kind of been rough to say the least and so any effort we can...to get our cultural identity back. Even if it is just a little bit, even if it is just a teaching here or there in a sports camp or just a lesson. It is a major step in growing again as a tribe.

In making this comment, this participant relates cultural identity back to overall wellness, and they relate Indigenous identity as something that has been lost over the years. The participant is also stating why it is important to “make an effort” to bring that cultural identity back to the tribe. Another participant discussing the importance of teaching culture in the summer camp stated “...They [camp educators] see where our students lack in cultural identity and feeling and being tied to where they came from... it has a tie to our cultural identity. In hopes that it helps spark a little bit of interest in our culture again, because it has been lost over the years.” This statement further stresses the importance of why the work of the summer program’s cultural component is so important.

Both participants above expressed that culture “has been lost over the years” and that cultural education helps to bring back some of that cultural identity to the tribe. This connection is important to highlight, because it shows not only the need for cultural identity in health and wellness, but also that cultural education is a resistance to colonization and an effort for cultural survival. One participant discussed why decolonization in education is important with the following statement;

“...In the earlier days, it was all about making yourself good by protecting those around you. And you could not do that without the knowledge and education needed to make sure that you are healthy...that your family was healthy and that your clan had a piece of knowing that you are doing your part and daily activities and so, a channel of caring and knowledge is still there...”

This is an important finding, as it demonstrates the importance of cultural connections in one’s overall health by mentioning that traditional knowledge and education is “needed to make sure you are healthy.” This participant quote also refers to Indigenous health and wellness education

as part of survival—it is survival of the people through the use of cultural knowledge (which this participant discusses by their reference to “protecting those around you” through a “channel of caring” which relates back to community health. In turn, cultural survival relates back to the overall health of our community for years to come.

### **Black Realm Themes**

The black realm is the emotional learning realm of the medicine wheel that refers to the aspect of community-based learning that is learned through the process of empathy and active listening, which is used in order to emphasize the importance of healthy *feelings*. The most common theme from the black realm was to have healthy creative outlets in which you can channel your feelings. One participant stated that students in culture class “... had people coming in for ... teaching ... how to engrave like rocks. And they said that was good stress reliever for them.” In short, this participant is explaining how culture helps to provide students with possible creative outlets to help them express their emotions for a “good stress reliever.”

In addition to emphasizing creative outlets, BYAP health educators stressed the importance of self-confidence. A research participant discussed what they hoped to see in student outcomes from attending camp, as well as what they wanted students to learn “...leadership and picking somebody up when they are down...” According to this participant, not only was leadership important, but knowing how to provide confidence in others when they need it was also important.

In addition to making others feel good about themselves, it was deemed important to feel good about yourself as well. Another research participant stated, “... You have to have those certain teachings ... to feel good about yourself... it helps you set goals and become a better person every day.” According to this research participant, having confidence in yourself relates

to being a good person and helping you to set goals for yourself. Participants expressed that having the skills and confidence necessary in order to make plans was deemed of importance for student outcomes in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program. As a result, it was hoped to help students give back to their community and become better overall people.

Additionally, becoming a better overall person was linked to learning from one's mistakes. One participant expressed that "... when someone makes a mistake, or isn't necessarily doing well at the specific activity that we are doing, then we are going to help that person learn a few things, maybe give each other some tips..." This can relate back to instilling confidence in people. Students may get discouraged if they make a mistake. However, teaching students to understand that mistakes happen, it provides the opportunity for students to learn from those mistakes. Another research participant stated, "...hoping that we learn from it even if it is good or bad, just mistakes, or if it is good, whatever we build on it..." This allows students to feel like they can keep going, even if something does not come easy to them. Teaching students to learn from their mistakes helps to instill confidence in students and allows them to learn that they can move forward regardless of having obstacles put in front of them. The participants in this study believed it was important for health and wellness educators to allow students to learn from their mistakes and "learn from it" or "build on it." They offer tips in order to improve from mistakes and allow these situations to prove opportunities for growth. They tell students that mistakes happen, and we can learn from those mistakes. This was often linked with self-confidence and letting students know that it is okay to make mistakes if we grow from them.

It was important for me to examine the themes of the medicine wheel, as this allowed me to make conclusions if the overall approach of BYAP was a balanced approach to Indigenous health and wellness. The balance of the medicine wheel was essential in concluding the



effectiveness of the program in relation to Indigenous health and wellness. After I identified the themes of the medicine wheel, I then turned my attention to the research questions of my study.

### **Research Question One**

The findings of research question one identified how culture was being used as medicine in a multi-ethnic sports program. One participant stated,

... I reminded them, you know, the Seven Teachings... we are here to have fun, and we are here to respect each other. That's part of our Seven Teachings. Be humble... humility is important. And a part of our Seven Teachings, and love each other when you got to love each other, you know what I mean? When I say love each other that that means, you know, taking care of each other, caring for each other, making sure each other... cheer on each other, applaud each other.... But the most important thing is just cheering each other on and creating that positive environment and acknowledging the fact that that's embedded within our Seven Teachings.

This participant statement was one of many references to the Seven Teachings that recurred throughout the series of interviews. Despite the differences in roles, many of the professional leaders of the more athletic classes and student mentors referred to the Seven Teachings as their own lessons that they pass on to students in the program.

Another prominent recurring theme in participant narratives were references to the use of a combination of community-based learning and land-based learning. Again, land-based learning is a series of activities that are based on Indigenous intergenerational knowledge of co-existing with the land. Community-based learning is a type of teaching strategy that uses teaching methods to integrate what they are being taught with the surrounding community. One quote that encompassed both teaching strategies was shared by a program administrator stating,

Our lessons... We do a lot of hands-on approaches when it comes to culture and whether it is looking at artifacts, whether it is taking walks and learning about history, practicing the music techniques, doing the medicinal and therapeutic, cultural heritage type of activities. We use a hands-on method most because you feel that our people learn best like that ... When they are experiencing it themselves [students], they tend to grasp it easier, and it is ingrained in [them] a little bit further than reading it through a novel or something. So, we really make sure that elders and people that are most knowledgeable are the people that we used to for our culture programs and specifically those ancestors and elders that are of the highest pedigree [stature] in our in our cultural system.

In fact, another participant stated,

We have a lot of speakers. And when you know, in our culture, elders and storytelling, our biggest learning device, that's how everything was handed down is by story. You do not see a lot of written stuff now. Now you might be seeing more written, but it was always oral traditions, storytelling, paying attention while watching like that's where the cooking comes in, but a lot of its storytelling, I mean, that's what you had the storyteller to keep the traditions alive.

### **Research Question Two**

Research question two asked, “How is use of medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators?” There were a variety of answers from participants regarding this question. One participant stated, “...[BYAP] see[s] where our students lack in cultural identity and feeling and being tied to where they came from... it has a tie to our cultural identity. In hopes that it helps spark a little bit of interest in our culture again, because it has been lost over the years.” This participant quote discusses how students lack in cultural identity but need to have an interest in

culture in order to revive our culture that seems to be dying over time. Cultural survival and preservation were prominent in half of the participant interviews (11 of 22).

Additionally, half of the study participants (11 of 22) also discussed cultural identity and the importance of having those cultural connections. One participant stated, “I think it is good for the kids to know where they have come from and to have an idea of their own background because they learn about a lot of stuff. ... they can do all kinds of stuff with anything that we have learned as our program.” Many participants, such as this one, express that it is a good thing for kids to know “where they come from” and the importance of knowing their “background.” As a result, not only was knowing your cultural identity important, but so is the connection to history and your community.

### **Research Question Three**

The aim of this question was to determine what health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result of culture used as medicine in the program. Participants in this study were asked if they noticed any health outcomes in students coming out of the program. Less than half (6 of 22) participants reported that they did not notice a difference in student performance and wellness as a result of cultural education. One respondent stated, “I cannot. I cannot tell you to be honest, because I really do not see them too much. I say that. That's the honest truth...” Those who stated that they had role as guest lecturers and/or stated that they only worked at BYAP for only a year had a limited amount of time with students, so they were less likely to report any differences in student health. In 16 of 22 participants, some noted small differences in student wellness (such as showing pride in your culture), while others were more detailed in their responses (such as pride in culture, community, and being part of a team). Years of service was directly related to what people reported of differences in student health and wellness as a result

of the culture education with educators with more years of service more likely to report noticing student health outcomes, although there were some mentors in their first year to report noticing student health outcomes. One participant who had only reported as working for BYAP for a year stated noticing the following outcome in students:

... Well, like they want to do their community proud, I think they would say, because, well, more people are. I see more people join in sports now, and they are trying to get more in contact with their culture, which is a good way to go. And then I do not know. It just it is good to see that they want to get in tune with their culture, and they just wanna, stay well... healthy.

This participant reported noticing that students were more likely to have ties to the community, participate in sports activities, as well as have pride and connection to their cultural identity after participating in BYAP. In contrast, another participant reported that they were with the program for over five years and stated the following:

I cannot say enough about BYAP because I think it is a really awesome program. It gets kids, you know, out, you know, interacting with each other, learning about teamwork, being respectful of each other, being, you know, respecting the sports, that they are doing positive behaviors, positive reinforcements...and...that that carries over into the cultural component of it where you know you hope that that positive, that positive attitude, you know, spills over into not only the cultural component of our class, but just in everyday life.

Health outcomes listed here not only represent the length of life (“getting out” for physical activity), but quality of life as well (positive behavior and positive attitude). Additionally, another participant reported that after being with the program for over 15 years, they did not

notice any student health outcomes when the program first started; however, they are only beginning to see differences in recent years. This participant stated,

I have noticed over the last three years that our students have been [more active] ... So I mean, it is taken a while. But those are the type of results you want to see... I'm happy, and I have seen it change. [It has] taken 15 years, but it, actually, it is a positive change.

This quote emphasized that student health outcomes were those that had to be noted over a longer length of time. This participant reported that they noticed how students are more likely to participate in sports/exercise activities after BYAP—but only being able to notice these outcomes over time.

A little over half of the research participants in this study (16 of 22) reported seeing changes in student health and wellness. Participants indicated a positive change in student wellness which included the following: learning respect, watching kids mature, becoming local athletes, setting goals, making friends, and giving back to their community. One participant noted how cultural education helped students find a connection to their culture in their everyday life.

[BYAP teaches] identity of who they are and especially like the ones who do not feel like they fit in anywhere and what you know and being able to tell them, you know, this is who we are and to be proud of who we are on to for them to be thirsty for it, you know? And it is like a lot of them are very, very thirsty for knowledge... I have a kindergartener who reads at 7<sup>th</sup> grade level and ... Like he'd always have to associate culture with something he read in the newspaper or something. He talks about the news and he liked the connection. And so... it is, you know, culture when you belong to it. It is so easy to get kids to embrace it...

While most participants examined the cultural education as a whole in the camp, this respondent specifically referred to the culture class as a guest lecturer. They also noted that students were finding creative ways to connect their modern-day interactions with their cultural identity and how BYAP gave them an outlet for making those connections.

#### **Research Question Four**

Research question four asked, “Can multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous culture be used as a tool for decolonization?” Many of the participants (7 of 22) struggled to define decolonization such as the following participant: “... there's so many different views of decolonization. .... Other people view decolonization as..., washing your hands of the church and the Catholic teachings... it is hard to pinpoint what decolonization is from one person to the next...” Once they reflected on the provided definition for decolonization as “going back to our roots,” they answered based on their understanding with the provided definition.

When asked, participants reported how they perceived BYAP fitting into decolonization for our tribe. Participants commonly associated Belcourt Youth Activities Program with our roots in terms of ancestral teachings (15 of 22). One participant stated, “our roots tie back to our ancestors...” while another stated, “this program shows us a lot and even taught me a few things on my roots.”

Besides learning from our ancestors, the BYAP provides a safe climate for its students. One participant highlighted that BYAP allowed students to learn culture “... by offering a safe place for participants to learn about their culture.” The BYAP plays a role in offering a safe space (which is a space that is intended to be free of bias, conflict, criticism, or potentially threats) to learn about culture—which allows students to connect with their culture without judgement from others.

In addition to these findings of providing knowledge of our ancestral roots, the Belcourt Youth Activities Program allowed a safe space for students to explore a multi-ethnic cultural identity within the local area. One participant stated,

... there's people that have the same mentality as like where they are set in their ways like you have to be from one place or another or where you have to claim one cultural identity—but it is so important to be inclusive, because there's no one else in the world that is like our tribe ...if I did not have the exposure to the different cultural identities that we have here than I would definitely be a different person. .... your history, it educates you..... not everybody understands that just because there's more you should feel less than special because of that because not everybody gets to experience that ...

The above participant quote refers to a safe space by referring to being “inclusive” in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program.

### **Research Question Five**

The findings of my last research question were to determine what could be gained or what is the purpose of taking a multi-ethnic approach to education. Many participants not only identified themselves as multi-ethnic, but they associated the community with having multiple cultural affiliations. One participant shared, “.... there are multiple cultures in the area. Different families follow different customs or have a mixture of cultural backgrounds.” This means that there are multiple identities present in the area.

According to the following quote, taking a multi-ethnic approach to education allows you to understand your background and assists you in forming your own cultural identity. Another participant stated, “... it is a part of our history. It is a part of our growing up part of who we are. And I think I also think it is important because it is again, it gives you that identity of where you

came from....” This participant was discussing why the Belcourt Youth Activities Program takes a multi-ethnic approach to education and describes this work as “important.” This work was deemed important as it is aimed to give students a sense of their identity. A similar point of view offered this additional quote: “... gives you background of who you are... I would like to know more about the past and the reasons behind, like, ceremonies.” One finding in this study was that there were a small number (3 of 22) BYAP educators that shared a cultural disconnect, while others shared that they felt like they were co-learning alongside their students (5 of 22).

In addition to the connections to cultural identity, participants offered further explanation on how learning about cultures other than just the ones that you personally identify with allows you to learn more about your community. One participant in this study stated, “...I feel like it allows you to understand people more, it allows you to understand your community more...” One participant shared that, “We are all integrated and it is important to showcase everyone’s culture.” In addition to this point of view, another participant stated, “There are even multiple tribes in the area (although Ojibway may be the most prominent). Different tribes often times have different backgrounds.”

Furthermore, another participant expressed that “...it [BYAP]... opens a door, you know, a doorway for...youth to, I guess, get a feel of what our traditional roots were. And if they choose to go down that path and learn more about it. I think it like I said, it opens up that door for an option for them, too, you know, maybe go back to our traditional roots versus .... the limited amount of teachings that they have now.” What this means is that the Belcourt Youth Activities Program provides students with a cultural education that they may have not had access to without the program. Another participant stated that “... it is important to acknowledge that we are who we are and that we all have a place, you know, to be here...to always acknowledge



that and make people feel welcomed and you know that they belong. Kids are, especially our kids here they have a hard time identifying with who they are or feeling like they belong..., I wish I...was raised more with more cultural history and background.... It is becoming lost...”

Additionally, adult learners who felt like they were learning alongside their students shared that they wanted to share their newfound knowledge with their children and grandchildren as an attempt to keep culture alive. One participant stated, “...then I could share that knowledge with my kids and my grandchildren...that's the importance of it is just keeping it alive and passing it down for when we are gone. Because otherwise we won't have much of a culture if we do not share or learn.” Cultural survival was a common theme throughout the medicine wheel in this study—but also, the most important. When asked about the purpose of this type of education, most participants believed that our culture was being lost over generations, which makes their efforts even that much more important.

### **Additional Findings**

The additional findings of this study were the observations made that did not specifically fit under a specific medicine wheel realm listed above (black, white, red, and yellow). These included findings that were drawn from examining the medicine wheel overall to determine if there was a balance between all four of the realms. In addition, I also included the findings from the questionnaire to determine if role and lengths of service affected research participant perceptions about their experiences as a health and wellness educator in Belcourt Youth Activities Program.

The first thing that I noticed was despite the program being a sports camp, there were multiple people who viewed physical activity and the culture components as related to each other. Many of these views expressed multiple domains or realms on the medicine wheel.

Consequently, as a result of using the medicine wheel realms as an analytical tool, my findings related to realms that I originally would not have thought they would have at first. Given the high sport-centered curriculum, my original thoughts were that the yellow (physical) realm would be prominent. After this analysis, I found that many of the healthy feelings toward identity related to other realms in the medicine wheel. “The notion of balance was also central within the medicine wheel teachings; people who were unhealthy were described as being out of balance” (Ross, 2014, p. 51). The aspect of identity was at the core of all Indigenous health, this theme related to all four realms of the medicine wheel. Using Ross’ ideas on balance, it can be inferred that by honoring aspect of Indigenous identity, we are encouraging a balance among Indigenous population to improve health outcomes. Using culture as medicine is a decolonized concept, which would point toward concluding the approaches of Belcourt Youth Activities Program as a decolonized and culturally sustaining approach to Indigenous health and wellness.

Interview commentary about experiences not associated with identity or Indigenous wellness were unable to be sorted into the matrix, such as experiences often associated with employment. An example of this would be in the following participant quote, “I went through the Elementary Ed. program at Turtle Mountain Community College, and so putting together our curriculum, you know, like for culture I [also] did at my regular job.” Research participant quotations that were associated with employment were unable to be sorted into the medicine wheel analytical tool.

In conclusion, all four realms were present in this study, which contributes to teaching students how to balance all four realms to contribute to their own personal health and wellness. A research participant in this study discussing the education approach of BYAP stated,

...So they realized that it all, it is all the same thing, and it is all the same idea, and not only the fact that health and fitness, because I feel like when people think of health, it is just like, oh, I need to go lift some weights and I need to run. But health and wellness, it is, you know, like I said before it all, it is all one big circle...

Essentially, we can relate the reference of “one big circle” to the imagery in the medicine wheel—as it is also one big circle. In addition to this participant, another participant stated:

Our culture has a lot with education and wellness and health...it is kind of like at its core... it is very spiritual... taking care of yourself and your well-being, your mental health and what people I feel like kind of forget sometime is physical. Health is part of that. It is all one big circle when you can. You take care of yourself physically, and then mentally it just come home comes full circle, and it really helps you...keeps you healthy.

In this participant quote, they discuss how there are multiple aspects that go into health and wellness. They talk about spirituality, physical activity, mental health, and emotional health with learning to love yourself. They discuss that health is all one “full circle” which all relates back to the medicine wheel and the need for balance, which is a decolonized view of health (as a full circle reference relates to an Indigenous concept and way of looking at health). This reminded me of the Indigenous and Metis aspects of culture that involve interconnectedness. I came to realize in this study that the medicine wheel and the circle referenced in this participant quote relate to each other. Everything is connected and has a relationship with the other in nature, as well as health. “It is all one big circle” emphasizes the ripple effect and how everything has a relationship with each other. One aspect of our health influences another, since it is all interconnected.

In addition to these findings, I did find differences in points of view based on the questionnaire. Approximately three of 22 participants emphasized that they do not feel like a cultural teacher. One participant stated, “I’m lacking...I should probably know more than what I do know. But growing up, you do not really learn about it. And not in my household. And schools do not really teach a whole lot about it either.” In short, this person felt a disconnect with their cultural identity and their cultural knowledge, so they did not feel like a cultural educator. However, this person was not alone in this disconnect as another participant stated, “I think it [culture] is something that I am still coming to learn about today. I do not claim to be a cultural expert, so I treat it as I am always learning. My cultural identity is what makes me who I am, but I also know that it changes as I become an adult. I learn more about my cultural identity as I become more knowledgeable about my ancestors and myself.” Although this participant expressed feeling connected to their culture, they felt like their views of culture were constantly changing as their knowledge grew over time. Even though this was a small fraction of interviewees, I think it is important to address the finding that even some adult participants who had roles in the program as mentors and professionals, felt like they were learning alongside of the students in this program. A third participant stated, “Yeah, because it is also important to know about your culture um, we are not really talk a lot about it, I found it interesting myself learning. I learned with the students while I was there.” This was an interesting finding that I was really surprised to uncover, as adults who felt a cultural disconnect felt like they were learning with the students. According to Fiola (2015), “Reclaiming cultural knowledge is fundamental to deconstructing ideas of superiority of Western knowledge” (p. 61). This is essentially what these educators are doing alongside of their students. They are taking control of

the transmission of culture from one generation to the next. They are learning about it with their students and serving by example, which reflects the principles of culturally relevant pedagogy.

Culturally relevant pedagogy empowers both the student and the practitioner. A reclaiming of cultural knowledge is a way to decolonize and reject the superiority of Western knowledge still present in Indigenous communities. It also reinforces the idea of intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Often times, this is associated with tribal elders and youth; however, this study has come to find that adults who feel a disconnect with their culture are also able to learn using the same concepts of teaching and learning as our youth. It also relates back to the idea of community-based education, as we all traditionally learn from sitting and listening to our elders.

Finally, two individuals who highlighted the importance of the Seven Teachings made connections with the camp creed. The Belcourt Youth Activities Program works in coalition with the National Youth Sport Program (NYSP). Due to this connection, the Belcourt Youth Activities Program uses the NYSP creed. The NYSP camp creed is the following:

I am a good sport at all times and conduct myself with decency and honesty.

I do my best to get along with others and have pride in myself.

I put forth my best effort in all competition and always compete fairly.

Walk Tall, Talk Tall, Stand Tall

There were two participants that made connections with the camp creed and the Seven Teachings. One participant stated, "...they would have to say... this... like a chant... after you sat down and thought about it, you know, that you have to be good sports and all this and that. But I would also mention that that's what our Seven Teachings are. ... that is going to make them grow into an amazing person. And once they would realize that they respected me."

The findings of this study were that the Belcourt Youth Activities Program used a variety of different teaching strategies from Indigenous culture. These strategies were used as preventative measures to help combat health disparities among Indigenous children. BYAP educators acknowledged the many different cultural identities present in the area, which influenced their approaches in the classroom. In the next chapter, I will go into further discussion about what these findings mean in relation to Indigenous health and wellness. Additionally, I will discuss how the Seven Fire Prophecy relates to the findings of this study.

## CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to better understand a multi-ethnic educational model in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP). In this chapter, I specifically address how I answered my research questions using the information from the medicine wheel coding chart that I referred to in my last chapter.

Using the information from the analytical tool sorting matrix, I was able to answer the following research questions:

- 1) How is culture used as medicine in a Metis youth sports program?
- 2) How is use of medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators?
- 3) What health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result of culture used as medicine in the program?
- 4) Can multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous culture be used as a tool for decolonization?
- 5) What can be gained or what is the purpose of taking a multi-ethnic approach to Indigenous culture?

These guiding questions helped to introduce the idea that honoring culture and identity in the classroom is a method of reimagining ourselves as Indigenous people in the post-colonial reality, in which we currently live, that truly matters. However, before I discuss the research questions, I believe it is important to note how the Seven Fires Prophecy was introduced in this study.

### Introduction

After completing my interviews, I was left with a story from one of my interview participants. It was the story of the Seven Fire Prophecy of the Anishinaabe people (included in the preface of this dissertation). Despite growing up in an area where Anishinaabe culture is

present, I had never heard this story. A tribal elder in my study decided to share this story with me (a benefit from snow being on the ground at the time),

[We will] continue on this path to [destroy] Mother Earth, or we are going to continue now ...it would have to be all of us, not just the Native American people, but everybody, the world that many cultures would have to take this turn to try to get...Mother Earth healthy. And I really think that's where we are at right now is because technology is killing... everything ...It is our Mother Earth is sick. And so that's when I talk to you. When you asked me that question about why is it important to know this? Because if we decide to take that other role [to educate our youth about culture and mutual respect of others], that means we need to get rid of a lot of the technology we need to start healing mother Earth and healing ourselves. And they say If we do that, we will make that a fire. But if we do not, we will only stay in at Seventh Fire until destruction.

This was an amazing story that related everything that I was coming to learn in my study of why multi-ethnic Indigenous education is so important. Some researchers may look at this story as a piece of fiction. It is a prophecy, so why would I think this is helpful information? Lambert (2014) states, “Stories allow us to bridge from Indigenous knowledge to scientific knowledge” (p. 30). In addition to this information, Lambert (2014) refers to Trimble, et al. (2008) when he states “Legend[s] and myths are alternative forms of history. They are stories whose origins are lost in time about actions that may be foreign to the non-Indigenous experience of how the world works (p. 31). Our stories are a piece of history that has been passed down from generation to generation. It is our way of passing down information. Many of our stories do bridge Indigenous knowledge to scientific knowledge—which is why it was not surprising to hear that the phases of the Seven Fire Prophecy have already happened. Years ago, we saw the Fifth Fire



come true as Indigenous people were under military attack, and our land and independence were taken away by the “light-skinned” race. The Sixth Fire came to be in the unfolding of the Boarding School era when our children were taken away from our Indigenous teachings, which caused our people to lose their will to live and their purpose in life. Similar to the tribal elder quoted above, Fiola (2015) states “Anishinaabe Elders believe that each of the fires (or eras of time) that were predicted has come to pass and that we are currently in the time of the Seventh Fire” (p. 2). Many of the traditional Metis people, Ojibway, and other tribal nations have interpreted the "two roads" of the Seven Fire Prophecy (where we need to choose the right path or continue on the path to destruction) refers to the road to technology and the other road to spiritualism. If we wish to avoid the path to destruction, it is essential to return to our spirituality and traditions as Anishinaabe descendants. However, as the elder in the provided interview quote stated, it will take all of us to come together in unity.

The work that we strive for, to make sure we do not continue the path of destruction, is to ensure that our culture and our people live on. If the path to destruction is truly referring to technology, this is related to scientific evidence (global warming is just one example). Fiola (2015) states, “The Seventh Fire speaks of the importance of the work of *Oshikibimaadiziig* [New People] as contributing to the potential for the eighth (and final) Fire,” which is an eternal fire that indicates the unity of all humans (p. 3). The idea is that if we come together as “one mighty nation,” then we can come together in the face of brotherhood to save us from a path to self-destruction.

Prior to the data collection process, I had never heard the Seven Fire Prophecy of the Anishinaabe people. In addition to learning this prophecy, one thing that I wanted to learn from other BYAP employees was how they viewed Metis culture and if they felt a connection to that

culture (brotherhood<sup>4</sup>), despite the many ways that people can describe themselves in the program. I know that I identify as Metis, but I also know that my background was not the only one for the area. I was raised with both Metis and Anishinaabe traditions, (my father's family were Master Metis Fiddlers, I learned how to jig, I learned how to jingle dress dance, and my mother made sure I participated in Anishinaabe ceremony), so I grew up walking the two planes of Metis and Anishinaabe identity. I also recognize that my former coworkers have different backgrounds other than the one I was brought up learning in my own home, since I have worked with the Belcourt Youth Activities Program since its first year. When participants described Metis and Metis culture, they mainly described Metis as "mixed blood." Participants discussed Metis as something more than simply describing Metis as "mixed blood." They related Metis culture with the Turtle Mountain culture (which has multiple cultures/identities present), but also recognized that it is different than the Ojibwe culture that certain families in the area might identify with more than the Metis culture.

Participants in this study reminded me of my own experiences speaking what little Michif/Metis language I could—a native French speaker told me that I was speaking "broken French." I was not speaking French, I was speaking Michif/Metis. Our culture (including the language) is so unique that many people not associated with the tribe may not know it even exists, because it is so rare. The participants in this study often reminded me of my unique experiences as they continuously described Michif/Metis as "special" and "unique." This shows

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<sup>4</sup> My use of the term "brotherhood" in this dissertation refers to the sense of community and unity among the Anishinaabe and Metis people as a result of mutual cultural respect of one another.

how the brotherhood of the Seventh Fire can come into play—coming together to make something unique that shows a connection between two originally different cultures.

In my own experiences growing up, identifying as Metis, I sometimes felt like I was “othered” in the classroom and that Metis was a dirty word. It was still how I identified, but I did not always feel welcome. According to Fiola (2015), “...most Metis are unaware that we are including in the *Oshkibimaadiziig* (New People) spoken in the Seven Fires Prophecy and that we are welcome...” (p. 2). The Belcourt Youth Activities Program serves as a gateway for the *Oshkibimaadiziig* to feel like they are welcome. Even though BYAP educators might not identify themselves as Metis, they stressed the importance of respecting others’ cultural identities. After analyzing the interviews, I noticed the majority of responses of people connecting not only Metis culture with a sense of home (17 of 22), but also their references to the multiple cultures in the area (French, Metis, Anishinaabe, and Ojibwe) were all mentioned in responses. The Seven Fires Prophecy and the views of multi-ethnic Indigenous educators reinforce the idea that educators must consider all possible local cultural identities (including those on Indigenous reservations).

### **Questionnaire Analysis**

Many participants identified as “Turtle Mountain Chippewa,” which seems to be associated with the pride of “knowing where you come from.” Many participants had a sense of pride associated with their community, which seemed to affect how they identified. In addition to this finding, it was also important to recognize how the federal government continues to affect the way many participants self-identity as well. Fiola (2015) states that “...identifying as [Indigenous] and Metis (reasons for not self-identifying in these ways) in the past may have to do with persecution by the government and internalized racism...” (p. 3) Internalized racism refers

to the phenomenon that is directly affected by a racial classification system. This is still an existing issue today in this area as one participant shared the following statement:

When I first started working in the Turtle Mountain Belcourt Schools, I really was offending a lot of our elders, and it was because, you know, they would say, that's not our way. And your grandparents did not live that way, you know, because they knew who my grandparents were. And I'm like, I know. You know what? I'm not trying to be offensive; you know. But this is what I have to teach, because this is what we are federally recognized. And so ... I could give Shane [BYAP Director] a lot of credit, you know, of being open to things, you know, being open to all of it.... for our teachers or our guest speakers. Maybe this one was Cree. Maybe this one was Anishinaabe. Maybe this one was Metis. You know...it was never offensive... Shane welcomed all of that.

This statement is powerful as a direct example of internalized racism (negative consequences for identifying as something other than how we are federally recognized). This participant acknowledged that she was not trying to be offensive in her approach to culture in the schools and was raised with a different cultural background than what she taught to students. However, she was forced to teach one cultural identity over another, since we are federally recognized to be one specific culture. This participant discussed how federally recognized identity is where our funding comes from and that this dictates how Indigenous education is approached in the schools. Fiola (2015) discussed how persecution and internalized racism cause people to self-disclose a certain way. This participant's experience reminded me of how I accidentally offended someone on the Tribal Nations Research Group Board. Neither of us meant to offend with how we personally identify or approach education (or in my case research), but sometimes it happens as a result of the many varying cultural identities in one area. We are federally recognized as

Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, but as demonstrated in the self-disclosed cultural identity terms (Figure 4) above in this study, only 32% of participants self-identified this way.

A common self-identification strategy among Indigenous populations is passing. Passing means to shift from one racial reference group to another (including other groups of color) that have been perceived to be less marginalized in the existing racial hierarchy (Fiola, 2015, p. 31). By extension, it was not a surprise that only 4% of participants identified as Metis (despite half of participants in this study relating Metis culture to their own families), as this term is not federally recognized by the United States government. In addition to the issues with conflicting identities in this quote, I thought of Azure's (2013) ideas on appreciative inquiry using negative experiences (in this case, being called offensive) to contribute to a positive outcome, which in this quote relates to the formation of a cultural program that takes multiple identities into consideration in the hopes to never offend anyone from any of the local cultures. It was the negative experience of being accused of culturally insensitivity that a culturally sustaining approach was born, as the same participant (a lead educator in the creation of the BYAP cultural program) later added this in their interview:

We had to kind of keep it [the cultural curriculum] broad. So as long as we are teaching this many Ojibwe words and ... this much history, these many guest speakers, you know, it could be Metis, could be Ojibwe, because that was good about [BYAP]. It did not have to be one specific one specific [culture]. Metis or it could be Ojibwe, or it could be Anishinaabe. It could even be [our] people or ...our neighboring community people of like for Fort Totton or Fort Yates for, you know...which is a good thing because I think it is a good for our students to know about other cultures and compare our culture with the other cultures.

It was important for them to highlight the importance of being open to new things and other cultures. This approach to cultural education is not only culturally relevant (by teaching student's own interest and cultures), but culturally sustaining (as it takes a multi-ethnic approach that teaches students how cultures are interconnected in the area).

Bruchac (2003) states, "Indigenous is made up of many cultures, hundreds of them. There is not just one history of the American Indian, but countless histories" (p. 8). Even though most participants described themselves as "Indigenous," their connections with culture were different, which was prominent throughout the interview process. Despite self-identifying as "Indigenous," many participants expressed their experiences and connections with Metis culture, often relating it to themselves and/or their community. This unique voice can be shared through the following participant quote:

... I feel that one of the biggest issues from where I live—and where we live—is that a lot of people feel like they have to choose that they have to be "traditional," which is our Ojibwe/Anishinaabe side and Metis, which I feel is a combination of French and Michif side... I am very culturally diverse. I come from many different backgrounds and that's very unique. People do not understand that does not just happen.... they are special and unique because of it.

One thing that I noticed in this quote was that this participant, like myself, felt the pressure to choose one identity over another. They also interchangeably use the terms Metis and Michif (which was something that I grew up doing as well, since it refers to the same culture in my area). This participant had a positive outlook they had about celebrating their multi-ethnic background describing it as "special." Fiola (2015) states that, "...both European and Anishinaabe cultures were significant influences in the lives of the Metis and contributed to the

synergetic development of ‘their own distinctive belief system’” (p. 18). As I reflect on this participant quote and how it celebrates the multiple “sides” of culture present in the participant’s own life, I think back to Bruchac’s (2003) concept of countless histories. It recognizes how unique our tribe is and the distinct belief and history that is present in the area. Fiola (2015) discusses the work of Devon Mihesuah (1999), a social theorist who works with multiracial Indigenous peoples and explains that “the challenge for multiheritage Indians wishing to live in two worlds is to construct strategies for coping with social resistance to their membership in both groups” (p. 28). When living in poor communities, federal monies make all the difference, which as a result affects how we self-identify as a result of internalized racism. Accepting multiheritage Indigenous people results in a social resistance to the membership of walking the two planes (in this case, Indigenous and Metis/Michif). As a result, this could influence how participants self-identified, as all participants did recognize Metis/Michif culture as one of the many identities present in the local area. This information also helped me to stay mindful of cultural differences and points of view as I progressed throughout my research and in seeking the answers to my research questions.

### **The BYAP Education Model**

Using double consciousness allowed me to examine through the lens of someone of “mixed blood.” As previously stated, I wanted to maintain a double consciousness that allowed me to maintain both identities as a scholar and Indigenous woman. To do so, I needed to make connections with other Indigenous scholars for guidance. When trying to see the cultural foundations of the BYAP education model, I was making connections to the work of Joseph Bruchac. According to Bruchac (2003), all parts of nature play a pivotal role in oral tradition—even with childbirth by the widespread belief of Indigenous People that “new stories and new

tellers are born every day” (Bruchac, 2003, p. 9). This means that our elders pass down stories and knowledge to our younger generations to become their own storytellers. It infers that our youth must learn these histories, as well as add their own in order to maintain the history and pass down our lessons from one generation to the next. “Traditional knowledge enables us to see our place and our responsibility within the movement of history...Today we see a great revival of traditional practices in many tribes...These restorations are important symbols of a sense of community, but they must be accompanied by hard and clear thinking that can distinguish what is valuable in the old ways from the behavior we are expected to practice as members of the larger American society” (Deloria et al., 2001, p. 46). This was also something that I found throughout the interview process when participants were sharing their lessons and methods used throughout the BYAP program—a revival of cultural traditions before they would be lost forever. The hard and clear thinking in what is valuable in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program are the lessons that enable youth to maintain *mino-bimaadiziwin* (a good balanced [healthy] life).

Not only does a revival of cultural traditions and co-learning indicate a decolonized approach to survival and health, but it is also a culturally relevant and sustaining practice. The Belcourt Youth Activities Program uses strategies of culturally relevant teaching on a variety of topics that are relevant to the local area (farm/garden to table approaches to cooking). This is an attempt to appeal to student’s values and interests, so students have a meaningful experience with the lessons. It is also culturally sustaining as BYAP takes an approach to education that considers multiple cultures as they plan the lessons, as culturally sustaining pedagogy is often a multicultural and multi-ethnic approach for students of varying cultural identities.



One way that Belcourt Youth Activities Program uses culturally relevant teaching strategies is they base a lot of their existing curriculum on the Seven Teachings of the Anishinaabe. The Seven Teachings (which I will go into greater detail later in this chapter) were prominent throughout many interviews and all four realms of Indigenous wellness. References to storytelling, the importance of listening, and bringing in community elders were recurring themes throughout many interviews. Although only 4% of participants self-identified as ‘Metis,’ the Belcourt Youth Activities Program approach to teaching and learning does have connections to a Metis belief system. Fiola (2015) states, “...aspects that influenced the traditional Metis belief system [are] consensus, interconnectedness, sharing and communalism, time, respect for elders, symbolism, and death, and treatment of the dead” (p. 15). All of these (except for the death and treatment of the dead) are common themes throughout this study and the identified education model.

Decolonized approaches to Indigenous education with its approach to community education emphasizes tribal elders as teachers. Ross (2014) states that, “For the first time in centuries, the Elders had no one to teach...left without a role to play, they suffered terribly. At the same time, the youth never got to hear the words of the Elders, never got to understand their language, their history, the lessons learned or the sacredness of life. The connections between generations suddenly ceased, leaving everyone gasping for spiritual breath and confidence in the future” (p. 49).

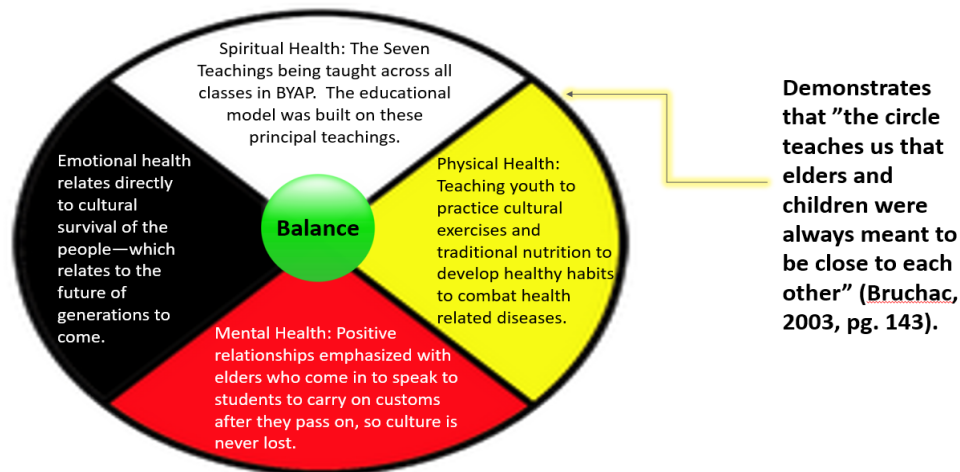
When I reflected on these interviews, I referred back to the medicine wheel, and I thought back to the shape and Bruchac’s reference to the circle— “the circle teaches us that elders and children were always meant to be close to each other” (Bruchac, 2003, pg. 143). The medicine wheel is a circle that links the relationships between tribal elders and youth in an endless cycle of

cultural learning and preservation. It is a cycle that ultimately serves as a basis for cultural survival—the traditions and language carry on to the younger generation in hopes that they share it with their own kids. Through this model, the culture is never lost. This endless cycle emphasizes the importance of bridging relationships between tribal elders and youth, which was prominent in participant interviews. This relationship is what I emphasize in the following model:

**Figure 5**

*The Belcourt Youth Activities Education Model*

### The BYAP Education Model



Through this cycle, the knowledge of the Seven Teachings is where a student begins; they then learn the importance of early intervention to combat health related diseases that are affecting the Indigenous populations, then a relationship is bridged with community elders and youth to help carry on the importance of cultural survival and helps to determine the future goals of the individual and the tribe. When participants discussed their feelings toward having connections to their own cultural identity, pride in their culture feeds them back into the white realm, and the cycle continues generation to generation. “A child born in traditional times was born into a world that was, in its essence, deeply spiritual and centered on striving to maintain

balance between the emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions inherent in everyone” (Ross, 2014, p. 64). It is this balance that this model is trying to accomplish—creating a balance for our younger generations to improve their health and wellness.

When examining Belcourt Youth Activities educational model, the findings pointed toward a balanced approach (as shown in Figure 7 above). However, it was also important to analyze the perceptions of how educators viewed the effectiveness of the program. After sorting interviews in the matrix, themes from each realm were then identified for the findings of this study. The following section will specifically address these identified themes in this study.

### **Red Realm Themes**

Healthy thinking starts with healthy relationships in the medicine wheel, and this was a major theme throughout the interview process. There is existing research on healthy relationships in relation to Indigenous health, which states that, “The spiritual aspect of knowledge about the world taught the people that relationships must not be left incomplete...However, when the tribal concepts are translated into scientific language, they make a good deal of sense. Completing the relationship focuses the individual’s attention on the results of his or her actions” (Deloria et al., 2001, p. 23). These conclusions from Deloria et al. (2001), add to the notion that relationships affect our health, as they affect many of the life choices that we make—which can affect the balance of Indigenous health.

Relationships with family and family values are related to the culturally relevant teaching strategies. Culturally relevant teaching uses methods and techniques that are building from a student’s interests, values, and strengths and that helps them to have a more meaningful educational experience by connecting home with school (Gay, 2000). The importance of making connections between home and school is what many of the participants in this study stated

throughout the interview process, as well as the importance of connection to community. Another participant stated, “.... That makes them maybe go home. And they are excited to tell their parents ... tell their family what they had done today... Again, this statement reflects the importance of relationships, but this time how students go home and share the stories of the lessons they learned at camp. Relationships with the community was also emphasized by participants, as another research participant added that students “... want to do their community proud... and they are trying to get more in contact with their culture....” This reflects the idea of culturally relevant teaching with making connections with home and school.

### **Yellow Realm Themes**

Historical references by stating “back in the day” demonstrates the need for basic nutritional knowledge of our people by sharing that our people had healthier diets that depended on leaner meats such as deer and buffalo. Indigenous people depended on the plants and animals that the Creator gave them. Indigenous people used these traditional plants and animals for food, medicine, ceremonies, community and health; they used all parts of the animal (Patchell & Edwards, 2014). Looking back at the generations before us and how they gathered food relates back to learning from the land. Generations before us had to learn where they could live off the land and find access to food (even in times with very little money and food accessibility). Even if some of our older traditional plants or animals are not readily available anymore, they use what is currently in the area of land for resources. The above statement is an example of how generations before us learned to live off what they had for basic survival.

McLaughlin (2010) stated that prior to the colonization of Indigenous people, all chronic health conditions (including diabetes) were practically nonexistent in Indian country. The relationship with our culture needs to be restored in order to regain our health back. Many health

educators acknowledge that Indigenous people are more prone to develop health-related illness related to sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy dietary habits. Originally, I had thought that the yellow realm would be the most prominent realm, because of the high level of physical activity in a sports summer camp. However, this was not the case in my study, as the white realm was the most prominent with the most identified themes among all four realms.

### **White Realm Themes**

The participant statement referring to knowing the past and “build upon it” is important as it explains that knowing about our history helps to inform the decisions that we make today. “Examining the historical and colonial experiences of Metis people is paramount in order to understand contemporary Metis identities and relationships with spirituality” (Fiola, 2015, p. 38). As a result, this historical knowledge is essential in teaching students about their identity. The medicine wheel explains how our past influences the future by helping us make informed choices regarding our spiritual health using the information that we have from the past. This cultural knowledge and knowing where you come from was important to serve as a basis for all learning within the Belcourt Youth Activities Program education model. The BYAP health and wellness educators shared that they wanted students to have this knowledge and “build upon it.” This statement of building on the past relates to re-traditionalization. The reclaiming of Anishinaabe heritage or ‘re-traditionalization’ is a way to reimagine ourselves in the urban landscape. Re-traditionalization takes decolonization a step further by allowing us to decolonize (return to our roots) and modernize our traditions along with social change. According to Fiola (2015), re-traditionalization refers to the integration of traditional and contemporary demands in a culturally sustaining manner (which is also the same as decolonization to some scholars). These traditions

are modernized in accordance with social change. In other words, we need to find how to “build upon” our past (decolonization) in order to ensure that we have a future.

### **Black Realm Themes**

Providing creative outlets to help express emotions was the theme that I had originally expected to see in the black realm; however, I found more themes than I thought I would in this realm. Leadership is an admirable quality, but participants often emphasized the importance of practicing empathy. Participants linked health with picking up others to help instill self-confidence in friends and peers as an important part of health and wellness. Additionally, self-confidence relates to being a good person and helping you to set goals for yourself. This is not surprising as it relates to my own experiences with setting goals (i.e., having confidence helps to set attainable goals). I know I can accomplish my goals if I have the confidence in myself to accomplish them.

In addition, it was also important to participants that the BYAP campers learn that mistakes happen and that it is okay to make mistakes. We often grow and learn from those mistakes. BYAP educators emphasized that it was important to know that it is okay to make mistakes, but to treat them like a learning opportunity to “lift up others” and to “not give up.” Thus, learning to persevere, but also relating it back to providing others with confidence in themselves in order to keep going with the activity.

### **Analytical Tool: Recreated**

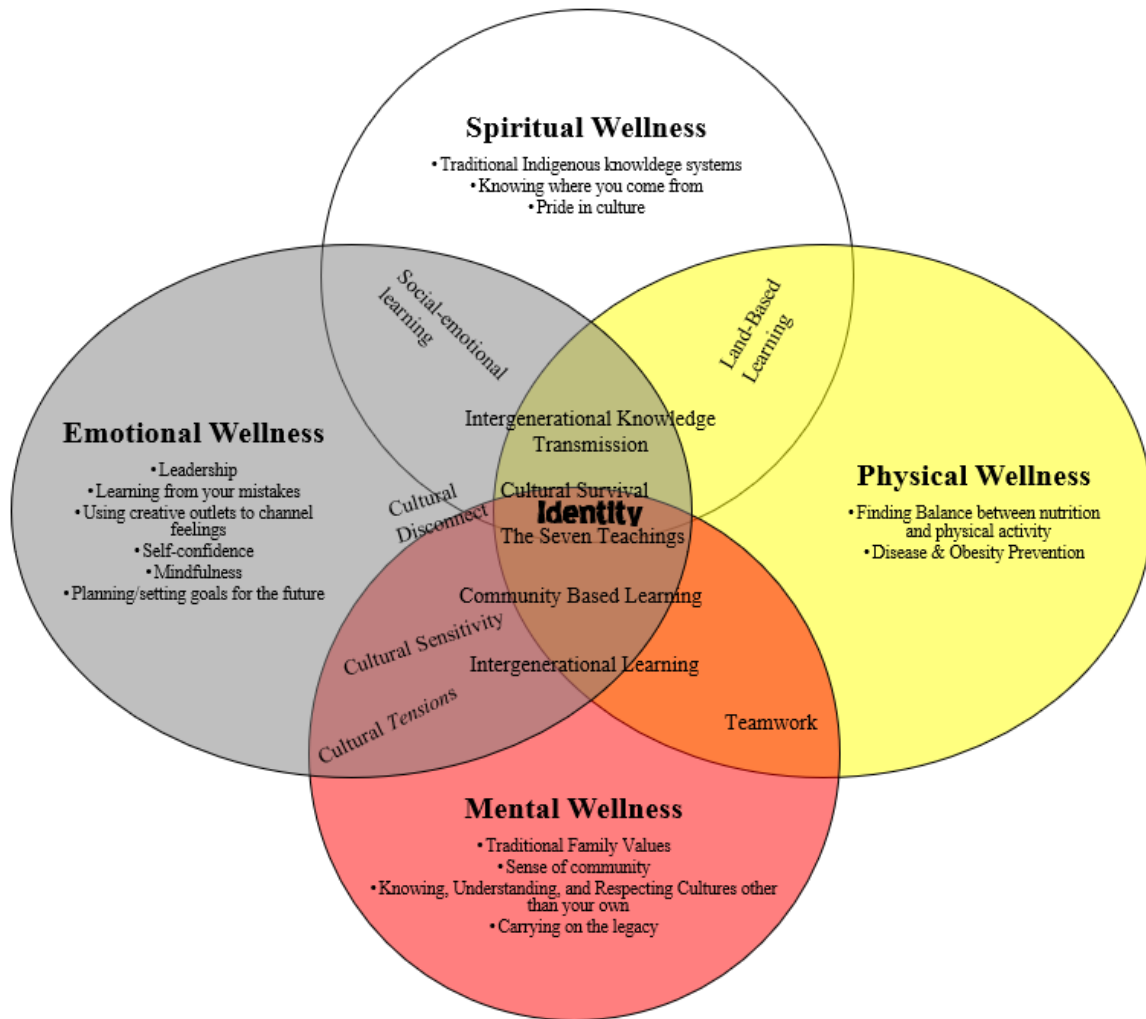
After conducting my interviews, I believed it was important to revisit my analytical tool to develop a new framework for the medicine wheel or ‘Sacred Hoop.’ Originally, this framework was very broad with the elements that I hypothesized would be listed under the Sacred Hoop. Similarly, in my original tool, the four realms have both culture and language

emphasized throughout, as these two components serve as foundations in the idea of Indigenous health and wellness. When I revisited the Sacred Hoop with my interviews, I concentrated on the context of each statement to properly sort it into the tool. The themes listed below in the revised analytical tool were recurring themes that were present in multiple interviews. Many of these themes overlapped each other, as some interview participants emphasized one or more themes using the same activities (i.e., land-based learning was prominent throughout the spiritual and physical realms of the sacred hoop).

According to Adamsen (2018), “The four realms are interconnected; therefore, an imbalance among the realms risk[s] the health and well-being of the group and individuals” (p. 4). The concept of interconnectedness is an idea that I believe to be very important when looking at my revised Sacred Hoop, as all four realms are in fact interconnected. This is shown with the idea that many of these realms overlap with each other. In my recreated analytical tool (Figure 8), I placed identity in the center as the central theme of the interviews. It was pronounced throughout all the interviews. Many participants stated the importance of identity and knowing where you come from as an important component of health. This theme, along with the Seven Teachings and Cultural Survival, were the only themes that were present in all four realms in this study. Identity was tied to all aspects of wellness.

**Figure 6**

*Revised Analytical Tool with Interview Themes*



Cultural Survival was important as it tied to the identity and saving what can be lost to new generations, which is why it was so important to teach our identity to younger generations to pass down to their children. The Seven Teachings were prominent as they were used to teach the importance of culture to younger generations. My Sacred Hoop (aka my reimagined analytical tool) created from this study demonstrates the importance of cultural identity—it connects with all four realms of the medicine wheel and contributes to a well-balanced and healthy individual.



By having a connection to culture, individuals are more likely to lower their risk of an unbalanced realm, therefore decreasing their chance for potential health risks.

### **Research Question One**

The findings of research question one identified how culture was being used as medicine in a multi-ethnic sports program. Basically, I wanted to know how educators were using teachings as a means to help heal its students from the effects of forced colonization and historical trauma. Fiola (2015) refers to the following Musqua quote from Kim Anderson's book "...they've got to dig up the medicines, to heal the people. And the medicines, in this case, are the teachings" (p. 11). Many people think of Western medicines when hearing the term "medicine," but medicine in Indigenous culture often refers to the teachings—natural ways to heal ourselves. The medicine is the teachings that are used to help heal our people.

After the preliminary data collection, my analysis helped me form other conclusions that clarified how cultural identity is viewed in the area. There were so many different identities, some that conflicted with others. What I have now come to learn is that I can no longer refer to the Belcourt Youth Activities Program under one singular term of Metis; it is in fact a multi-ethnic Indigenous sports camp. There were multiple cultures being addressed and taught throughout the camp. However, one commonality with teaching culture in the program, was the use of the Seven Teachings. The Seven Teachings of the Seven Grandfathers in the Ojibwe/Anishinaabe culture are principles of conduct to ensure the survival of all people. Using the Seven Teachings is a culturally relevant approach, as it builds on the existing cultural values within the community that helps to pique student interests early on and makes education valued by the community (not just the individual). The Seven teachings are love, respect, humility, honesty, truth, wisdom, and courage (which were described in greater detail in the last chapter).

In these teachings, it was believed that you must use them together (i.e., you cannot have love without wisdom). Again, it relates back to the Indigenous principle that everything is interconnected. These references often referred to respect, humility, truth, honesty, and love. The only two teachings never mentioned by name were courage and wisdom. No matter the role, years of service, the Seven Teachings, and reclaiming our culture (from the Seven Fire Prophecy) were pronounced throughout the interview and survey process.

Moreover, participants emphasized that students were taking walks and learning by nature, which relates to practices of learning how to co-exist with the land, which relates back to land-based learning initiatives. Also, by using intergenerational transmissions of traditional knowledge and building community relationships, they are using community-based learning devices. By using culturally responsive teaching methods (land-based and community-based learning devices), BYAP is helping to give their students a sense of belonging, honor their cultural heritage, and support their individual growth. Fiola (2015) discusses that part of Anishinaabe spirituality means to give back to one's community and through higher education, people have access to Elders, cultural teachings, events, and even ceremonies that they would not have access to without that education. This program is using the same approach to education, only not in the higher education setting—they are practicing early intervention in a sense with younger generations. Students would not have access to these teachings if it were not for the BYAP educational initiative to reintroduce culture to students.

The Belcourt Youth Activities Program is giving students access to education, but also using the traditional learning device of oral storytelling. One participant stated that storytelling is “the biggest learning device” for Indigenous people. According to Brayboy (2005) “...for many Indigenous people, stories serve as the basis for how our communities work...and

reminders of our individual responsibilities to the survival of our communities” (p. 427). In other words, communities come together to teach Indigenous students as a reminder of our individual responsibility for the survival of our people and “keep the tradition alive” as our participant states it. This mixture of land-based and community-based teaching methods are described in the above quote as more traditional forms of Indigenous education (culturally responsive approaches), which is what the culture-as-medicine educational model was built upon. The idea of medicine is in the teachings—tying these teachings back to our culture, using the traditional methods of learning that our ancestors used to help our younger generation take back the culture that could be otherwise lost forever.

As I reflect on the question of how culture is used as medicine in a multi-ethnic sports program, I had to reflect back on how Indigenous communities view medicine and healing. Medicine is viewed as the cultural lessons being passed down from generation to generation. Audlin (2005) states that, “Healing, rather, is something done in harmony with the flow of life, with the cleansing ways of Grandmother Earth. If you do healing in this way, it will not tire you, at least not much, and it will always be effective” (p. 251). By using land-based and community-based learning strategies to teach culture, we are using the “cleansing ways of Grandmother Earth” and this will be considered effective. The Belcourt Youth Activities Program uses both land-based and community-based strategies in order to provide an effective program of culture as medicine.

### **Research Question Two**

Research question two asked, “How is use of medicine perceived and enacted by program facilitators?” When health educators shared their perceptions of how culture as medicine was used in the Belcourt Youth Activities Program, they shared the importance of sparking cultural

interest in youth, cultural preservation, disease prevention, as well as how culture as medicine not only relates to physical health, but an understanding on the world around you and a respect for other cultures. It all related back to survival—both individual survival and an attempt for cultural survival for the tribe across multiple generations. This was seen in the educator views that they were learning alongside the students, as more than one generation was learning from the tribal elders. “The healing techniques of the dominant culture are primarily curative, not preventative...The healing techniques of the traditional peoples of this continent (and traditional peoples worldwide) emphasize prevention over curing” (Audlin, 2005, p. 258). In extension, culture as medicine is perceived similarly to Audlin’s (2005) point of view, the lessons (medicine) passed on to the next generation is set to be preventative of sickness, not curative. It works in the long-term as it prevents us from losing part of our identity that makes us a balanced individual.

### **Research Question Three**

The aim of this question was to determine what health outcomes are noticed in youth as a result of culture used as medicine in the program. In approach to this question, it is important to state my view of the term “health outcomes.” Health outcomes are the physical and mental well-being of people that represent not only the length of life, but quality of life as well. These outcomes are the changes in a person’s health status that are a result from interventions (i.e., positive outlooks on life as a result of therapy or lower body mass index as a result of an increased exercise regime).

Participants reported differences that are tied to three of the four realms of the medicine wheel (physical, mental, and spiritual). Length of service for participants seemed to influence their responses. Responses of participants with longer lengths of service were slightly more

detailed compared to one-year participants. Participants with longer lengths of service to BYAP made more detailed connections between the cultural and physical aspects of the camp discussing healthy relationships, respect for sport, having a positive attitude, and carrying knowledge into everyday life. This relates back to the observation that those with more years of service were more likely to report noticing student health outcomes. If educators are with the program for longer lengths of time, they can make observations of student health outcomes over time.

Participants also shared how students were also attempting to make connections between what they learned in culture and their everyday life. Allowing students to connect their culture with modern-day interactions is a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach that allows students to learn their traditional ways, but also in the evolving ways they are living in the current dominant culture. According to Fiola (2015), “a return to traditional spirituality among Anishinaabe people today represents one form of contemporary agency, as well as the unfolding of an ancient prophecy” (p. 2). One participant referred to a student who is “thirsty” for the culture, but also connected culture with the contemporary state he currently lives in. This relates back to the Seven Fires Prophecy with learning how to coexist with different cultures in the world today.

Furthermore, the health outcomes for youth participants in BYAP were linked to all four realms of the medicine wheel. Mental learning was emphasized through healthy friendships and the idea of having community ties. Physical learning was emphasized through the reference of creating student athletes and students who were more likely to participate in physical activities. Emotional learning was emphasized through the reference in creating/setting goals and students being more likely to go into career fields of health and fitness. Finally, spiritual learning was

emphasized through the references of gaining a knowledge of tradition, as well as forming a connection with their cultural identities. Since all four realms were referred to in the responses for this question, it is easier to conclude that BYAP educators feel like the work they do in the program has a positive impact on student health. It is a form of healing. The work of BYAP educators show a balance on the medicine wheel and should produce a balanced well-being for participants. Audlin (2005) states that “healing is a sacred activity...The method of healing reminds us of our connectedness to the Sacred Hoop, and that, once the connection is again complete and strong, we will be healthy” (p. 252-253). This seems to be related to the outlook that participants in this study have when approaching health as well. They are helping to complete the connectedness of the Sacred Hoop.

#### **Research Question Four**

Research question four asked, “Can multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous culture be used as a tool for decolonization?” When I was trying to hypothesize an answer to this question, my views on decolonization would say that multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous health education could be used as a tool for decolonization. It was our way of making our own way through a colonized world and determining our own role in it. Many of the participants (7 of 22) struggled to define colonization. There are so many interpretations of decolonization, which is why I attempted to define it in my interview question. I used the definition of “going back to our roots.” When approaching this question with participants, I wanted to see if they saw the Belcourt Youth Activities Program as a tool to assist us in going back to our roots as Indigenous people.

These views relate back to the teaching model that BYAP uses that emphasizes elders. According to Fiola (2015), “Elders and spiritual teachings are being sought out and participation

in ceremony is on the rise” (p. 5). This relates to the outcomes that BYAP want to see in their community—a rise in seeking out the culture. In addition to learning from our ancestors, study participants emphasized co-learning with students. They were learning about these roots from the program by listening to our community elders. It is important to use this type of learning model as “our ancestors...show us the possibility that, together, we can endeavor to form that mighty nation and light the eighth and final fire of eternal unity and ensure *mino-bimaadiziwin* (healthy, balanced, good life) for all those who are yet unborn” (Fiola, 2015, p. 212). Moving on to the eighth and final fire means to come together as a community in order to learn and form unity.

What really resonated from participant quotes was the idea that I was not alone with the feeling that there were certain people that are “set in their ways” by trying to make others choose one identity or another. Creating an educational environment that is built on learning that we should not “feel less than special” for being multi-ethnic is building a safe space to learn for multi-ethnic students by allowing them to feel included and appreciated within the community.

In addition to students learning from their ancestors and understanding their roots, BYAP’s approach to education was thought to allow for students who may identify as more than one culture—which many of the employees themselves identified with as educators. Multiculturalism served for decolonization and inclusion, since not every tribe identifies the same or connects with the same traditions. Lambert (2014) suggests there are five phases of decolonization: (1) The rediscovery and recovery of traditional history, language, history, and identity. (2) Mourning of what was lost in order to promote healing and to dream of what the future could be. (3) Dreaming where the colonized explore their cultures, invoke their histories, expand their worldviews, and Indigenous knowledge systems in order to image other

possibilities. (4) Commitment to defining our role as [educators] in the community to become political activists for scholarship in the community. (5) Action where the dream and commitment categories become strategies for social transformation. In other words, information gathered from my research reinforces that BYAP does serve as a way of decolonization. Participants in this study discuss learning about culture (rediscovery), acknowledge that culture is being lost over time (mourning), provide a place for students to learn and expand their world view (dreaming), educators are becoming political activists for teaching culture in the community (commitment), and the BYAP is taking the necessary steps of dreaming and commitment to become an agent for change (action). All of which can conclude that their approach to education does serve as a tool for decolonization.

#### **Research Question Five**

The findings of my last research question were to determine what could be gained or what is the purpose of taking a multi-ethnic approach to education. Participants acknowledged that different families follow different customs or have a mixture of cultural backgrounds. Therefore, it is so important to acknowledge the multiple identities present in one area. Fiola states that “returning to traditional values and world views is a way of understanding existing identity categories available to Metis people” (p. 37). It is in returning to our traditional values that we truly understand the many categories of identities that can be present in one area, which sustains cultural pluralism by supporting cultural and linguistic competence among students. There is no one distinct way of looking at Indigenous culture; it is forever evolving and many of us identify with our culture so differently.

Second, it is important to recognize that BYAP allows students to have a place to learn their history and learn more about their own cultural identity. Participants in this study discussed



building knowledge of your identity and where you “come from,” but additionally—they added to it with a curiosity for themselves to help understand their culture (i.e., sharing that they would like to know more about traditional ceremony).

Furthermore, participants also emphasized the importance of learning about the community you are living in and having a relationship to coexist in harmony, which also relates back to the Seven Fire Prophecy (the need for unity of the people foretold by the prophecy). The importance of community and respecting other points of view and cultural identities were prominent throughout this study. According to Lambert (2014), “Those of us who are not from the specific tribe telling the story can never understand the context of that story. It is through the culture and history of the tribe that the story is understood” (p. 30). Not only is it important to learn to co-exist with each other, no one can ever understand the context of stories and our history better than the tribe itself. We are all connected. Our community is important, because in coming together—our history, our stories, and our people are understood and preserved. I found this during this study. Despite many of the interviewees (the first-year mentors) not knowing me well, they spoke to me like they knew me well. I was part of the community, so they would use phrases like “well, you know” a lot in interview. It was not until writing the transcription in my first draft and my advisor asked me for context that this became even more clear. I understood more of the context of the stories, not only because I conducted the interviews, but because I was part of the tribe. I was able to understand background of a person because we were interconnected in some way. The belief that “we are all integrated and it is important to showcase everyone’s culture” shares the same point of view that I have come to find in this study. We are all interconnected, and it is almost like our tribe can be considered like one big family. The belief that we are all integrated shows that everyone in the community is

connected, and there is a need for education in respect for all the community and its cultures. A community built on mutual respect would ensure that we can stand in together in unity and brotherhood (i.e., I do not identify as Lakota, but I respect their culture and recognize them as our geographical neighbors who share a common history in respect to colonization and Indian boarding schools). The belief of having multiple tribes in one area allowed for cultural education to happen without “othering” any other local cultures. It gave a safe space to learn and did not offend other local cultural identities, because all were being recognized and mutually respected. This mutual respect for all cultures in the area helps to bridge us toward the unity foretold by the Seven Fire Prophecy.

### **BYAP Creed**

After the two professionals made the connection to the Seven Teachings with the camp creed, I was able to see the references in the camp creed aligning with the Seven Teachings. The creed mentions honesty specifically, but the Seven Teachings of truth, love, respect, and humility are also present in the creed. It teaches students to be honest, tell the truth, love yourself, respect others, and conduct yourself with humility. The knowledge of the Seven Teachings was a prominent theme throughout this study—many references were made to them in all four realms. It was all interconnected to health and wellness. The Seven Teachings of the Anishinaabe are a values-based philosophy of education. These seven traditional tribal values are love, respect, humility, honesty, truth, wisdom, and courage. Love is at the front of all teaching; it represents loving yourself and carrying love across all the teachings. Respect is to honor all things and to respect the needs of others. Humility represents the teaching of knowing that you are sacred and to live selflessly (not selfishly). Honesty is to accept yourself for who you are, to accept the gifts that you have been given in life, and to not deceive yourself or others. Truth is to trust yourself,

your teachings, and the decisions that you make for yourself. Wisdom is to listen to your surroundings, to observe, and to accept the teachings and knowledge that the Creator has given you. Courage is to the ability to defend what you believe in, to defend what you believe is right for yourself, your family, and your community. All of these cultural values can be integrated into any class, as well as can be used to build a connection to these core values (Boyer, 2005). This is important, as the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabe people are a code of conduct that reflect the values of the tribe. This is also emphasized throughout BYAP as a code of conduct for students to follow that use these core values by connecting home with school.

### **Limitations**

This study has several limitations. As I started to embark on this research, the Covid-19 outbreak began. This had a great effect on my study, which affected the sample group. In lieu of in-person interviews that allowed me to travel to people as needed in order to ensure accessibility, I was required by new IRB Covid-19 guidelines to conduct Zoom interviews and online surveys. The Zoom interviews worked out well for many people, but because many people were affected by Covid-19, many people could not participate due to lack of time or family obligations. An online survey was not ideal for the types of questions posed by this research, so I was not able to gather much data from this information. Indigenous populations traditionally favor oral narrative rather than providing written (or typed) narrative. We are traditionally people who tell our stories or narratives orally, so in-person interview or Zoom was the favored method of data collection for my study. Oral narrative provided much more detail compared to the online survey, as many of the survey responses returned limited written responses to the questions (many responses provided had very few words or incomplete sentences). I was only able to follow up with one survey respondent to gather additional

information for clarity or detail to their survey, as some online survey participants expressed that they simply did not have the time to follow up. The one participant that I was able to follow up with after the survey expressed that they were unsure what some of the questions were referring to (once I provided more information, they were able to answer the question fully). An online survey does not provide researchers with the ability to explain questions as a participant is taking the survey. The online surveys in this study were used to primarily supplement the data from the Zoom interviews, which produced much more information and detail.

Another limitation is that we do not know if students are carrying their cultural lessons into their adult lives. Participants have stated that students are provided with a cultural education that they may never have had access to prior to attending the program and learning more about their cultural identity. One participant shared, “I think it is good to have this [cultural education] in there because they are learning about it where they might not ever learn about it.” In addition to this information, we also know that they are participating in our program and learning new Indigenous practices. Another participant stated, “[we] teach them how to make just some native culture foods ...how to play hand games...they were taught how to play the hand drum or just the regular drum, and they were also got to help with playing it. They got to each, hold the drum. They got to do birch bark art. They get to do a lot of stuff that incorporates their culture, and I think they really like it.” This participant expressed the participation of each student in multiple Indigenous traditional practices. However, further study would be needed in order to conclusively prove that Belcourt Youth Activities Program students are truly carrying on the legacy that the Indigenous elders and community members are passing down to them. This would have to be a long-term study of past students on the use of the lessons and teachings they

used in their adult lives. This could be done by studying BYAP students themselves, not just the teachers.

As mentioned before in this study, further study will be needed to conclusively prove multicultural health education effectiveness in Indigenous communities. This study had too small of a sample size to conclusively prove this method is effective in Indigenous communities. However, this study can serve as a reference or jumping off point for future research conducted using multicultural approaches to health education specifically with Indigenous communities.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As mentioned in this study, the perceptions of Belcourt Youth Activities Program shed a light on how Indigenous wellness educators view multi-ethnic health education, which is valuable information for wellness educators as they approach working in multicultural areas. However, for future studies, the sample group could include former BYAP students. This program is over 15 years old, which would allow us to examine how former students who are now adults carry the health lessons into their adult lives. Doing so would allow us to determine how effective these health lessons are in the long-term.

The Belcourt Youth Activities Program is unique in its approach to health education in hopes of teaching students to become healthy and well-balanced individuals. It works in coalition with the National Youth Sports Program, so opportunities for comparative studies would be possible with similar programs in other communities. This approach would be able to more conclusively prove whether the unique way that Belcourt Youth Activities Program's multi-ethnic approaches and ability to connect culture with physical activity is either less/more effective or has the same outcomes.

## **Methodological Implications**

The findings of this study provide several implications for Indigenous research practice. This study will contribute to a collective understanding of the impact of using culturally sensitive and innovative Indigenous practices. First, the analytical tool utilizing the medicine wheel is also a major contribution of this study. After the reflection on the work of other Indigenous researchers (e.g., Grande and Wilson) and their call for fellow Indigenous researchers to serve as revolutionary agents, it was more important than ever to help forge a new Indigenous-led path in relation to my own research. In order to forge my own path, I referred to my own experiences and my culture for inspiration. As a “mixed blood” tribal member, I feel often “othered” in academia. It was my feeling that multi-ethnic Indigenous people often having hurdles to jump through that others do not. I often used the phrase “jumping through hoops.”

Using a medicine wheel is a unique research methodology for coding interview, as many of the studies that I had read through used it to plot health and wellness categories or as an Indigenous method for program evaluation. Although I began with other researcher’s approaches to using the medicine wheel (Azure, 2013; Beaudry, 2015; Guzman et al., 2020), my analytical tool is entirely my own self-created tool of coding Indigenous interviews that allowed me to examine an entire quote for context, which was my goal in order to protect the narrative’s meaning and to show respect for the interviewee. As an Indigenous researcher, I did not feel like I was staying true to myself if I used a Western (dominant society) approach to coding. It was for these reasons that I had to create a coding methodology that used a tool or symbol that was already familiar to me. Thus, the inspiration for coding interviews using a “Sacred Hoop” or medicine wheel was born. It was my vision that I keep my participant quotes within their original contexts, so the narrative couldn’t be misinterpreted. It is my hope that other Indigenous

researchers find inspiration to challenge the dominant society's approach to narrative and analysis by using Indigenous methodological approaches, such as my use of the medicine wheel.

Second, Indigenous researchers often hold their identity close as they go throughout the research process. This was also the approach that I took in relation to my own study. I referred to myself in first person and my experiences as part of the research process throughout this dissertation. It was important to me to weave in my own experiences and stories because it demonstrated the connections that I was seeing as I went through the research process. I grew up with storytelling in my own family; this was the oldest form of educating others in my culture. It was not only important to keep my Indigenous identity close, but also to share those experiences as my own way to educate others about how my multi-ethnic Indigenous lens affected how I approached my study.

Lastly, researchers who work with Indigenous populations should be culturally sensitive to the multi-ethnic demographics of Indigenous populations. In order to ensure that cultural sensitivity to this group is being practiced, providing self-disclosure of cultural identity terms should be practiced when working with this population. According to the prophecy, only the action of coming together in unity and rediscovering our traditions will lead us into the Eighth and Final Fire, which will lead us to survival.

### **Implications for Future Practice**

The findings of this study provide several implications for health education practice and recommendations for this population. This study will contribute to a collective understanding of the impact of using multicultural teaching methods in a multi-ethnic Indigenous community. Moreover, it enables us to understand how multicultural approaches to health and wellness education can empower practitioners in Indigenous communities. Culturally sustaining

pedagogy sustains cultural pluralism and “a pluralistic society needs both the many and the one to be vibrant” (Paris, 2012, p. 95). When I think of multiple cultures needing the one and the many to be vibrant, I think back to the following participant quote:

I feel like there’s definitely a lot of people in the world who have multi-ethnicities, who have multiple backgrounds where they come from—but especially here [Turtle Mountains]. It is so rich. You see it everywhere you go. One day you go into a sweat traditionally and the next day you are invited to go over to a friend’s house to play fiddle and sing and just be [with] people. To me, it just feels like that’s what home feel like to me.

This quote refers to cultural pluralism and that is makes the culture “rich.” This participant expresses the uniqueness of being able to participate in traditional ceremony (sweat lodge) and being able to enjoy Metis/Michif music and dance (fiddle). Multi-ethnic Indigenous identity is rich and unique. Culture is not a singular term; it refers to not only our racial background, but the background that surrounds us in our everyday life. It influences our choices and our behaviors. It is why multiculturalism and multiethnic Indigenous identities make me think of home, too. We cannot undo our history of interracial marriage, but it helps shape us into who we are today. There is strength in numbers; by coming together in mutual cultural respect, we can remain as resilient as our ancestors before us. It will help us to heal and bring us to the Eighth and final fire. Culturally sustaining approaches to education allow practitioners to feel like they have the necessary knowledge and awareness of available resources to improve youth health and wellness outcomes regardless of geographical location and economic disparity. Additionally, my findings in this study indicate the need to build cultural capacity among educators and students. By taking culturally sustaining pedagogy a step further, in addition to teaching students about



their culture, we also teach them of cultures that they may not personally identify with themselves, but with which interact every day, thus teaching students (and educators) about their community and the world in which they currently live. Approaching culturally sustaining pedagogy with this idea in mind, we can bridge a road to brotherhood between people of different cultural backgrounds.

First, educational institutions should consider decolonizing their cultural lesson plans and education models when serving a multi-ethnic Indigenous population. This is done through recognizing all tribal affiliations in the area served in order to ensure cultural identity is respected in all its forms. Decolonizing educational models does not necessarily mean that we go back to our roots, but rather learn to stay true to our cultural identity within a colonized world. In order to do that, we must make informed decisions regarding education using what knowledge we have about our students and their culture—and if we don't know, we ask. As I reflect on the participant quote "... it is important to acknowledge that we are who we are and that we all have a place, you know, to be here...to always acknowledge that and make people feel welcomed and you know that they belong," I think of that sense of needing to feel welcomed and have a safe place where I feel like I belong for students. We cannot undo our history of intertribal and interracial marriage—as it was described in interview; it is a part of who we have become now. It is necessary to recognize this double plane with Indigenous identity when entering the classroom.

Finally, a combination of community-based and land-based educational models could be developed in hopes to provide cultural programs that help carry on the traditions of our Indigenous populations. Family values and relationships with elders were identified as important knowledge systems in addition to learning how to co-exist with Mother Earth. These models

used through a traditional Indigenous storytelling method and hands-on learning are an effective form of education, while staying true to traditional Indigenous knowledge systems is invaluable when approaching Indigenous health education.

### **Conclusions: Walking Two Planes**

Originally, I thought Metis meant that you were multi-ethnic, but I have come to realize that it is so much more. Baumgartner & Zinggeler (2010) state that places in the world are starting “to acknowledge the transcultural and hybrid realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” in regard to new and complex identities in terms of ethnicity, race, and identity becoming more prominent in society. This is also reflected in Metis communities, as a complex identities are taking shape from people connecting with more than one identity. Fiola (2015) stated in her study that “each participant highlights the tenacity and resistance of Aboriginal people in overcoming historical suppression of our cultures, the forced divisions between our peoples, as well as the power of spirit, which calls us to reconnect with our Anishinaabe spiritual ways of life” (p. 203). She was talking of Anishinaabe and Metis people. I agree with Fiola, because my experiences in this study have confirmed it, too. The quest in overcoming historical suppression of our cultures, as well as the cultural divide is one of the many reasons why my participants stated why they practice the work that they do. One participant in this study shared the following:

...we have to be able to walk on two different planes...Well, my personal experiences with that... being Native American that's its own plane. That's very unique because we are...unique people within the world we are definitely the smallest population in the world, I would say, and then we have to be able to adopt and survive in the world outside of home, because that's completely different...

This quote discusses coming together to “adopt” ways to learn how to “survive” outside in the world. It was also through quotes like these that made me realize that we must walk two planes as Indigenous people. It is our way of showing resiliency and survival in the world around us. It does not make us any less Indigenous, because pride in our culture was across the board in this study—not one person expressed shame in being who we are, but they recognized a mutual respect for all cultures in a world in which we live and how that is how we survive and function together.

Despite the results of this study not being originally what I had assumed, the information gathered from this study can assist tribes to incorporate more multi-ethnic programs when approaching Indigenous health education. The findings of this study had references to the perception of being forced to approach cultural education a certain way (singularly) in the school system due to funding source requirements. This study not only celebrates the unique approaches of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program, but it is a call for action in reference to the need to approach culture with Indigenous populations as something that is multi-ethnic or multicultural. When Fiola (2015) discusses the aim of her work with Metis populations, it is to encourage those with Metis ancestry to reconnect with their Anishinaabe spirituality in an attempt to contribute to fulfilling the work of *Oshkibmaadiziig* that was spoken in the Seven Fire Prophecy, which encourages descendants of the four Original peoples to take the path to spirituality and for us (Anishinaabe and Metis) to stand together in unity without giving up our unique cultures. Baumgartner & Zinggeler (2010) discuss “the shift from multiculturalism (defined as differently cultures and languages living together) to hybridity (defined as mixture of culture and languages together)” that communities are starting to see more of in modern day society (p. 3). In order to stand together, both cultures need to be equally honored and respected

in relation to educational programming. We must learn to be both cultures, and the hybridity or the mixture of our cultures (Metis & Anishinaabe) would need to take place. This study can provide a basis for argument in order to secure funding for Indigenous health and wellness education programs that take multi-ethnic approach in their educational models.

The incorporation of multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous health education aids not only in disease and obesity prevention but assists in providing education for all individual students no matter how they personally identify among this population. Multi-ethnic approaches to education help to improve the social-emotional health of the student population. Furthermore, the incorporation of a multi-ethnic approaches to Indigenous health education also can serve as a tool for decolonization, because it allows us to walk two planes and survive in a world where many cultures are present. This approach to health and wellness education serves as a means of cultural survival in a multi-ethnic world.

In closing, if not the most important finding of this study, cultural survival was something that could be gained from the efforts of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program multi-ethnic approaches to education. The Belcourt Youth Activities Program provides students with a cultural education that they may have not had access to without the program. Furthermore, the statement that BYAP “opens a door...[to] go back to our traditional roots” also concludes that there is hope that students will make the choice to return to our traditional roots, and we have a limited number of teachings (as many participants also expressed losing our culture over time). According to Fiola (2015), “The historical context of colonialism continues to thread its way through the lives of Metis people today” (p. 206). We are still seeing this colonialism affect us today (as it is reflected in the participant narrative). We are losing our culture. Deloria et al. (2001) state, “The key to understand Indian knowledge of the world is to remember that the

emphasis was on the particular, not on general laws and explanations of how things worked. Consequently, when we hear the elders tell us about things, we must remember that they are basically reporting on their experiences or on the experiences of their elders” (p. 22). As our elders pass on, part of our culture dies with them. That is, unless they have a record of their teachings or pass it on to the next generation. This dissertation fits into this description of traditional knowledge and education, because this study emphasizes the need for multi-ethnic cultural education, because it ensures that there is a culture to pass down by tribal elders and the lessons never die through culture as medicine. Culture as medicine uses traditional knowledge and teachings to help heal Indigenous populations from historical trauma.

A participant who talked about co-learning with students sharing the lessons with their kids/grandkids reflects the traditional transmission of knowledge. The passing of information from one generation to the next. This approach is decolonizing education through culturally sustaining pedagogy because it recovers tribal practices that were present and in use prior to different periods of colonization. In traditional Indigenous culture, elders were always meant to be close to our youth. The lessons of our elders get passed on to the younger generations, so the lessons of our elders are protected for years to come (even after their death)—then these lessons are passed down to the next generation through the cycles of life. If Belcourt Youth Activities Program is bringing in tribal elders to help pass on and bridge the gap to provide transmission of intergenerational knowledge, they are using one of the oldest forms of Indigenous education. However, they are bridging the gap that was once there from years of forced colonization by providing cultural education that students may not have had access to otherwise. It is cultural survival that helps us maintain balance in our health, as a relationship with cultural identity are at

its heart. It is for these reasons that their work and the work of other cultural educators becomes even more critical in our existence as Indigenous people.

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## APPENDIX. INTERVIEW & SURVEY QUESTIONS

### *Short Questionnaire:*

- How long have you worked with the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP)?
- What is your role with the program?
- What is your preferred term for your cultural identity?

### *Survey Questions:*

- How do you define 'Metis'?
- What comes to mind when you think of Metis Culture?
- What comes to mind when you hear multi-ethnic?
- How do you think of your own cultural identity?
- Culture Facilitator Question: Why do you include culture education courses in a health and wellness sports camp?

### *Follow Up Question (only if interview question 3 does not provide enough information):*

*What relationship do you see between our culture, and educating about health and wellness?*

- What aspects of culture do you teach as part of the Belcourt Youth Activities Program (BYAP)?
- Why do you think BYAP includes culture education courses in a health and wellness sports camp?
- BYAP has one day a week devoted to traditional nutrition, how does this approach to health and wellness work?
- In what ways are you noticing a difference in student performance and wellness as a result of the culture education?

- What methods or lessons are you using in BYAP utilizing to teach culture?
- Why should educators in the area take multiple cultures (Anishinabe, Cree, & French Canadian) into consideration?
- BYAP has a day where they teach students how to make frybread. Some people might say that frybread isn't healthy or staying true to our roots as native people. What do you think about this statement?
- Why do you think this type of cultural education is valuable/important? What purposes does it serve?
- If we define 'decolonize' as 'to go back to your roots' as an native person (Moore & Taylor, 2014, para. 1), what is the relationship between specific practices in this program (BYAP) and decolonization?