Embedding Indigenous Ways of Knowing Into My Practice: A Self-Study

by

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Abstract

Born out of the need for reconciliation in education, this self-study examined how my practice, as an early primary French Immersion teacher, was aligning with the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and examined where I was meaningfully embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my daily teaching. Following a mixed methods approach, I began by collecting qualitative data through the form of weekly journal entries, and then created a daily self-assessment tool which collected quantitative data. When analyzing both sets of data it became apparent that my success with meaningfully embedding the desired content increased over the data collection period and that the act of turning a reflective lens on my practice acted as motivation to go deeper with connections to the First People Principles of Learning.
Acknowledgements

Many people offered me tremendous support on the journey to completing this thesis. I would like to acknowledge Sean Toal, my Faculty Supervisor, for the care and dedication he has put into reviewing my work. Sean was very encouraging throughout the entire process and always challenged me to present the best work I possibly could. I would not have been able to complete this program without the steadfast support of my partner Rob, who always offered a listening ear, and a delicious meal when the going was rough. I would also like to recognize Kendra who offered emotional, and editorial support. Finally, words cannot express the gratitude I feel towards my friend Desirée who bravely embarked on this journey with me. She has been my rock and my sounding board through the highs and lows, and I do not think I would have survived without her.
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Chapter 1- Introduction

This research was born out of Truth and Reconciliation and the need to embed Indigenous ways of knowing into education throughout British Columbia. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) published ninety-four calls to action in 2015. These calls to action specifically appealed to educators to weave Indigenous ways of knowing, history and legacy into their practice (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In 2007, The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) developed the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL), which are nine guiding principles for all educators to follow in order to create classrooms where Indigenous world views are celebrated (Chrona, 2014). This self-study examined how I as a practitioner was embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my specific context, as a primary French Immersion teacher, in a rural community, at an elementary school with a population of 17% Indigenous learners.

Personal Context

Growing up in the urban hub of Montreal, I had little awareness of the Indigenous cultures around me. Even though there were two Indigenous girls in my graduating class of thirty-six students, we never talked about their culture or their family history. Every summer, from the age of ten onwards, I spent two months in Algonquin Park, at summer camp. This camp, like many others in Ontario, had Indigenous words and misused traditions incorporated throughout the place names and programs. I did not realize until I was much older the deep cultural appropriation that was occurring there.

One of my first classes at the University of British-Columbia was an Art History class about the art of the Northwest Coast First Nations. This was my first significant learning experience about the rich and vast world of the Indigenous people of this area. A few months
into the class, the professor showed a video about Residential Schools, with the warning that the content was disturbing, and that we could leave the room if needed. Not knowing what she was talking about, I stayed and watched. I was utterly shocked, and deeply saddened by what I learned. The video was a historical account of a Residential School in BC, and I remember that a classmate was crying in earnest throughout the video. Afterwards, he shared with us that his mother was a survivor of such a school. This learning experience urged me to inform myself about the history, culture and legacy of the Indigenous people of this place.

When I enrolled in my Bachelor of Education, I chose to be part of the Diversity cohort at UBC. Our cohort was paired with UBC’s Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP). Although we had most of our methods classes together, a few times a week our NITEP classmates would go to a separate space for an Indigenous ways of knowing class. This caused rumblings among the rest of our cohort as we wondered why we couldn’t attend the classes as well. Many of us were extremely interested in learning Indigenous ways of knowing, to enhance our understanding of how Indigenous students learn. During one of our combined classes, a heated discussion ensued in which many of us were asking to be part of the Indigenous ways of knowing class. The university denied us the privilege to do so, stating it was unnecessary for us to take that class, and it would cause scheduling conflicts. It seemed, at the time, an inconvenience to include all pre-service teachers in this learning. As such, this experience left me seeking other avenues to better understand how I could better connect with Indigenous students.

A few years later, a school where I was working took part in the Project of Heart, which provides education about the colonization history in BC. A few years after that, our staff experienced the “Understanding the Village” workshop, led by a local Indigenous leader and
social worker, Kathi Camilleri. “Understanding the Village” is an experiential workshop which leads participants through the rich cultural history of Indigenous cultures in BC, to colonization and Residential Schools, and finally through to the current day reconciliation movement. These experiences were soul wrenching, spurring me to further inform myself on how I can support reconciliation in my own context.

I started my Master of Education journey at Vancouver Island University and was again immersed in a learning path. I was finally experiencing the deep learning about Indigenous ways of knowing that I was seeking since my undergraduate degree. In my first year, I experienced a brief glimpse into the tradition of the canoe journey and was fortunate enough to paddle a Tribal Journeys canoe with my classmates. Later in the program, we took part in “The Blanket” exercise, another learning experience which focuses on reconciling the colonial past of Indigenous people in Canada with current calls to action (KAIROS, 2019). Throughout the program, we had meaningful learning time with elders from the local Nations on Vancouver Island.

I used to think that inviting the Indigenous language teacher to my school a few times a year and providing some books with Indigenous content was doing my part to promote Indigenous learning in my classroom. Then I learned that it was my duty as an educator, working on Indigenous land, with Indigenous people, to embed Indigenous ways of knowing into every aspect of my practice. Through this realization, I was urged to pursue a self-study of my practice to further my knowledge and skills with incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into my classroom.
Professional Context

I am working as a French Immersion teacher in a medium sized city on Northern Vancouver Island. My work site is a single track French Immersion school, consisting of approximately 130 students from Kindergarten through Grade 5. The school is situated in a neighbourhood with residents of low socio-economic status, with subsidized housing across the street from the school site. As French Immersion is a district program, many students from this neighbourhood attend my school, as well as students from other neighbourhoods around the district. Many students from within the vicinity of my site do not choose to attend French Immersion, and instead, attend a larger neighbourhood school a few blocks away. The number of students who self-identify as Indigenous at my school is approximately 17%. The school district as a whole is made up of approximately 22% of students who self-identify as Indigenous.

As a practitioner in BC, I am working with the redesigned curriculum, which was widely introduced in 2015 (Storey, 2017). The new curriculum is “part of [a] broader education transformation process currently under way, [in which] the BC Ministry of Education is embedding Aboriginal perspectives into all parts of the curriculum in a meaningful and authentic manner” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4). Throughout the grade levels, Indigenous perspectives are woven into all curricular areas.

A few years prior to this research, I had a class made up of twenty Kindergarten students, five of whom identified as Indigenous. One of my students from this group, identified as Indigenous through her father’s heritage, yet she had no contact with him. At Student-Led Conferences in November, the girl’s mother asked me: “What will you be doing in the classroom to teach my daughter about her Indigenous heritage?” I had planned some activities surrounding Indigenous teachings, including visits with the Aboriginal support worker in my district, as well
as, inviting an Indigenous artist to work with my class. For a math unit around symmetry, I brought the school districts button blanket kit into my classroom. I also went on a field trip to the local museum which offers a rich history of the Indigenous people of this area, along with a large collection of art work and artifacts. Despite these activities, I still felt I could not answer the mother’s question, and I was not fulfilling my duty to the students in my class. I began reflecting on the ways I was integrating Indigenous perspectives explicitly and implicitly into my daily practice to provide the best education for my students.

**Problem Statement**

The problem guiding this research is my perception that the French Immersion system is not supporting Indigenous learners as effectively as it could. I believe that French Immersion schools may not be fulfilling their full potential to openly welcome and celebrate Indigenous perspectives and worldviews. There is scarce research examining Indigenous student success in French Immersion programs. Friesen and Krauth (2009) analyzed provincial data collected from Grade 7 students in BC and extrapolated that “6.2% of non-Aboriginal students [were] enrolled in French Immersion programs, compared to 2.4% of Aboriginal students” (p. 13). Furthermore, non-Indigenous students in French Immersion were not experiencing Indigenous worldviews woven throughout their educational journey in the ways that other students were experiencing their own culture. Coté (2017), spoke to the challenges of incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into French Immersion classrooms for educators today. One of the hurdles Coté (2017) pointed out is that “the French language and culture, which we are teaching and bringing to life in the classroom, has also been a language and culture of colonization of the Indigenous peoples” (p. 27). Other hurdles for Indigenous families to overcome in their participation with French Immersion programs were access and equity for Indigenous students to French Immersion
programs, availability of grade level appropriate French resources, and lack of knowledge among new French Immersion teachers about Indigenous culture (Côté, 2017, p. 27).

**Justification of the Study**

Justification for this study came from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) calls to action around education for reconciliation (TRC, 2015). The TRC called for governments to “make age-appropriate curriculum on Residential Schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students” (TRC, 2015). This call for educational transformation applied to all teachers, including French Immersion teachers. Further justification for this study is the fact that there is a gap in the current research. As shown in Chapter 2, there exists a large body of research detailing the benefits of weaving Indigenous perspectives into all aspects of a learners’ experience, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. Within the research however, there was not one study which highlights the importance of learning Indigenous worldviews for French Immersion students. Through the lens of my practice, this study attempts to start the conversation around how and what a French Immersion teacher can do to respond to the TRC calls to action around education for reconciliation.

As many researchers have observed, Indigenous students had more successful learning experiences when they saw their culture, values and ways of knowing reflected in their learning environments (Battiste, 2013; Kanu, 2007; Richards, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008). The same research highlighted the importance of all students learning through an Indigenous worldview, and pedagogy, which further supports my goal of focusing on how my practice can embed these crucial principles into everyday learning.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this self-study was to improve my practice in regards to weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into all curricular areas, and into every school day. To this end, I attempted to improve the learning experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in my French Immersion classroom. Another purpose of this self-study was to see where my practice aligned with the First Peoples Principles of Learning. Through systematic examination, I was able to re-evaluate areas of my practice that needed to be reconnected to the FPPL. Through this process, I was aiming to transform my classroom into a cultural safe place, for all families.

Research question. Through a self-study, my research aimed to answer the following question and sub-questions: How can I, as a French Immersion teacher, align my practice with the First Peoples Principles of Learning and meaningfully embed Indigenous perspectives into my classroom?

- How will my experiences as a learner complement my teaching practice?
- What explicit integration of Indigenous knowledge is part of my daily practice?
- What implicit practices are modeled on Indigenous ways of knowing?

Through thoughtful consideration of my practice and the intentions behind my work as a teacher, I hoped to understand how my practice is aligning with the First Peoples’ Principles of Learning and how well I am incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing in my day to day work.

Brief Overview of the Study

I conducted a systematic self-study exploring areas of connection in my practice to the First Peoples Principles of Learning, and instances when I was meaningfully embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my daily French Immersion teaching. From September to December 2018, I used weekly reflective journaling as a tool to record my experiences as a
practitioner, as I attempted to weave Indigenous perspectives into my practice. During that time, I also conducted a thorough review of the literature in the areas of Truth and Reconciliation, education for reconciliation, Indigenous learners, French Immersion and teacher reflective practice. In February and March I completed a daily self-assessment tool, which provided me with quantitative data. At the end of the data collection period, I used a coding technique to analyze my reflective journals, searching for common trends. I also analyzed the quantitative data provided by the daily self-assessment tool.

The outline of this study starts with a review of current literature related to teacher practice and an understanding of the First Peoples’ Principles of Learning, followed by a review of the methods used to conduct this self-study. In Chapter 4, I present the findings of my study and examine the implications of those findings in Chapter 5.
Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Marie Battiste (2002), a foundational researcher of Indigenous ways of knowing and pedagogy, described Indigenous knowledge as “all knowledge pertaining to a particular people and its territory, the nature or use of which has been transmitted from generation to generation” (p. 8). Daes (1993) added to the definition that “traditional knowledge of values, autonomy or self-government, social organization, managing ecosystems, maintaining harmony among peoples and respecting the land is embedded in the arts, songs, poetry and literature which must be learned and renewed by each succeeding generation of indigenous children” (p. 4).

Indigenous knowledge was in contrast with a Eurocentric model and worldview. The Eurocentric worldview only recognized knowledge stemming from Europe, including science, religion, and art, and it viewed Indigenous ways as “frozen in time” (Battiste, 2002). In contrast, Indigenous knowledge encompassed the interrelation between all parts of the self, natural, physical and spiritual (Battiste, 2002; Daes, 1993). During the years of the colonization of Canada, traditional knowledge and perspectives were suppressed, and extinguished. Through the process of Truth and Reconciliation, Canadians are working towards honouring and celebrating Indigenous perspectives and knowledge.

Truth and Reconciliation

Residential Schools. During the colonization of Canada, education was used as a tool to aggressively assimilate Indigenous people, by sending children to Residential Schools (Gebhard, 2017; Regan, 2010; TRC, 2015). Indigenous children in Residential Schools were often mistreated, malnourished, abused and neglected (Gebhard, 2017), and many children perished while attending Residential Schools, due to the terrible conditions and lack of care (Fee, 2012; Gebhard, 2017; TRC, 2015). The traumas of the Residential School system lasted for generations as “the system not only failed to provide Aboriginal peoples with skills necessary to flourish in
settler society, but also purposefully destroyed Aboriginal languages and cultural traditions, devastating thousands of families and entire communities” (Gebhard, 2017, p. 4). Important and irreplaceable knowledge, language, and traditions were lost as a result. Since the closure of the last Residential School, Canada has been taking steps to repair the damages, through the process of Truth and Reconciliation.

**Journey to reconciliation.** A major step towards reconciliation took place in 2007 with the implementation of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (Government of Canada, 2007; Nagy, 2014). As stated by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, “the Settlement Agreement represents the consensus reached between legal counsel for former students, legal counsel for the Churches, the Assembly of First Nations, other Indigenous organizations and the Government of Canada” (Government of Canada, 2007). The 2007 Settlement Agreement calls for the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), as one of its five elements.

To further the process of reconciliation, Prime Minister Steven Harper gave an official apology to the Indigenous people of Canada for the atrocities of Residential Schools, in June of 2008 (Fee, 2012; TRC, 2015). In his apology, Harper acknowledged the past faults of the Canadian government and its role in the creation of Residential Schools. He also specifically honoured survivors, individuals who attended the schools, and Indigenous communities:

> It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada. (Harper, 2008)
This apology signaled the start of more reparations to Indigenous people, including a call to reform education to include not only the stories and history of colonization from an Indigenous perspective, but also an inclusion of culture as part of the school system.

**Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC).** As called for in the 2007 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established that same year. The desired outcomes of the TRC were to “to facilitate reconciliation among former students, their families, their communities and all Canadians” (Government of Canada, 2019). Nagy (2004) further defined the goals of the TRC as “acknowledg[ing] past abuses, addressing the needs of victims, delivering a measure of accountability, outlining institutional responsibility, recommending reforms, and promoting reconciliation” (p. 202).

Beginning in 2007, with the support of funds from the Canadian government, the TRC traveled across Canada to host healing events for survivors and witnesses of Residential Schools (Nagy, 2014). As the TRC worked to collect survivors’ stories, it also held seven national events in major city centers (TRC, 2015; Fee, 2012). All Canadians were invited to attend these national events in the hopes of educating the public at large and bringing communities together for reconciliation (Fee, 2012; Government of Canada, 2019).

In 2015, at a culminating event in Ottawa, the TRC released an extensive final report of their findings. The final report detailed the history of colonization of Indigenous people in Canada, the traumatic legacy of Residential Schools, and the process and outcomes of the public healing events (TRC, 2015). An important aspect the final report were the ninety-four calls to action. The TRC’s calls to action were directed to the Canadian government and people of Canada, spanning the areas of child welfare, education, language and culture, health, and justice (TRC, 2015). Specifically, the sixty-second call to action appealed to federal governments to
work alongside Indigenous people and educators to create curriculums that taught the history of colonization in Canada as well as celebrated Indigenous pedagogy and ways of knowing:

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

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

ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.

iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.

iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education. (TRC, 2015, p. 331)

In response to these calls to action, the province of British-Columbia was transforming the education system in ways to support reconciliation and honour Indigenous perspectives.

Education for Reconciliation

In conjunction with the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission across Canada, the province of British-Columbia was also undertaking meaningful steps towards reconciliation through a transformation of the education system. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) was established in 1992 “to advance quality education for all First Nations students in British Columbia and to support communities in their efforts to improve the success of First Nations students” (FNESC, n.d., para. 1). Another government initiative to support
education for reconciliation was the creation of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (EAs). These agreements were “established as a way to include Aboriginal people in decision-making and focus on measurable student outcomes” (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-a).

**First Peoples Principles of Learning.** Continuing the work of reconciliation in 2006 and 2007, the Ministry of Education worked with the FNESC and an Advisory Council, comprised of Indigenous knowledge keepers, to create the English First Peoples 12 course (Chrona, 2014) as an option for the English 12 high school graduation requirement in British Columbia. Due to the rich collaboration and discussions with the previously mentioned groups, this landmark course took “into account, not only authentic First Peoples content, but also reflect[ed] First Peoples’ epistemology and pedagogy” (Chrona, 2014). In order to strengthen the curriculum of this course, and to ensure it was authentically honouring all Indigenous beliefs, values and histories, the Advisory Committee of Indigenous scholars, Elders and knowledge keepers, developed a set of guiding principles for the course. These nine guidelines, known as the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) were as follows:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
• Learning involves patience and time.
• Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.
• Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations. (FNESC, 2008)

The British-Columbia government and FNESC acknowledged that these principles were general and did not reflect the varied ways in which Indigenous people learn, “however […] the Principles are generally recognized as reflecting common values and perspectives about education held by First Peoples in BC” (Chrona, 2014).

Since their creation for the English First Peoples 12 course, the FPPL were introduced to all BC educators, as the Ministry of Education furthered its efforts of education for reconciliation. There was a strong consensus among scholars and researchers that learning environments enriched by Indigenous perspectives outlined in the FPPL, benefited not only Indigenous learners, but non-indigenous students as well (Battiste, 2009; Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Halbert & Kaser, 2015). This belief coupled with the calls to action for education led to wide spread use of the FPPL around British-Columbia, and have recognized the FPPL as best practice.

**FPPL and the OECD.** On an international stage, scholars were also researching best practice for providing quality instruction to all learners. The international Organization for Economic Development (OECD) provided data, collected by international surveys, summarizing current trends and best practices in education (Morgan & Volante, 2016). In 2012, as a culmination of extensive research on innovative learning environments, the OECD published a document which outlined seven principles of learning, as a guide to providing high quality education for all (Dumont, Istance, & Benavides, 2010). The seven OECD Principles of
Learning and the First Peoples Principles of Learning bore many areas of connection and crossover, as seen in the table below. Examining the links between the two sets of principles further supported that the First Peoples Principles of Learning were beneficial for creating rich learning environments for all learners. The Aboriginal Education Department in SD 37 (Delta) created the following table for teachers to reference:

Table 1

Weaving the First Principles of Learning Into The Seven Principles of Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 7 Principles of Learning (OECD)</th>
<th>First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learners at the center</td>
<td>- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The social nature of learning</td>
<td>- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions are integral to learning</td>
<td>- Learning involves patience and time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Recognizing individual differences

- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.

Stretching all students

- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.
- Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Assessment for learning

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.

Building horizontal connections

- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

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Note. Source: Webber (2016)

A key connection between the OECD principles and the FPPL was the notion that a caring relationship was central between the educator and the learner. This was illustrated by the association between the social aspects of learning and the need for supporting the well-being of
the whole learner. The fourth OCED principle celebrated the diversity between learners which is echoed throughout many of the FPPL. When taken together, these two lists served as a strong foundation for quality and equitable education for all students.

**New curriculum.** Education for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, involved transforming the education experience for learners, through systematic updates to the curriculum and pedagogy. Battiste (2013) spoke to the crucial need to decolonize education and that “Canadian administrators and educators need to respectfully blend Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy with Euro-Canadian epistemology and pedagogy to create innovative ethical, trans-systemic Canadian education systems” (p. 168). Kanu (2007) also implored policy makers to weave Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum to support the success of Indigenous students, and enriched learning for all.

In an effort to support reconciliation, improve education for Indigenous learners, and provide the highest quality learning for all students, the province of British Columbia began the process of transforming its curriculum in 2011 (Storey, 2017). Teams of curriculum writers, and policy makers worked closely with Indigenous communities and knowledge keepers to create a new curriculum, where Indigenous worldviews are meaningfully woven throughout all grades. This statement highlights the process through which:

The education transformation work builds on what was learned and extends Aboriginal perspectives into the entire learning journey rather than in specific courses or specific grade levels. This means that from Kindergarten to graduation, students will experience Aboriginal perspectives and understandings as an integrated part of what they are learning. (Government of British Columbia, n.d.-b)
This landmark new curriculum was implemented in September of 2016, for Kindergarten through grade 9, and began in the fall of 2018, for grades 10-12 (Storey, 2017).

**Indigenous Learners and Current Research**

Researchers pointed to the intergenerational trauma of Residential Schooling as one reason that Indigenous youth were falling behind non-Indigenous peers in education (Battiste, 1998; Kanu, 2007; Richards et al., 2008). The leaders in the field offered perspectives on why a gap in success existed between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners in schools, and what needed to be implemented to help close that gap.

The goal of Kanu’s (2007) research was to identify factors leading to success for Indigenous students in a large, multicultural, urban high school, in two Grade 9 social-studies classes. One class was taught with Indigenous ways of knowing, contexts and resources at the forefront, and the other was not. Indigenous students who were in the “enriched” class far outperformed their Indigenous peers in the other class (Kanu, 2007, p. 34). Kanu’s (2007) research also found that Indigenous students were more likely to attend class and stay in school if they were learning in environments that honoured their culture and ways of knowing.

Battiste (1998, 2013) referred to these *enriched* learning environments as *decolonized*, and described the need to move away from Eurocentric knowledge being the guiding force in education. From her research, Kanu (2007) described decolonized teaching methods and strategies proven to boost the success rate of Indigenous students in schools. These methods included teaching through stories and sharing circles, making the learning experiential and relevant, connecting the learning to Indigenous cultures and experiences, involving the community, and making the learning hands on, visual, and auditory (Kanu, 2007). Kanu (2007)
added that Indigenous perspectives should be the “philosophical underpinning of the curriculum” (p. 27).

Richards, Hove, and Afolabi’s (2008) findings differed from Kanu’s (2007) research and emphasized an alternative set of indicators for Indigenous student’s success at school. In their 2008 commentary on Indigenous education in BC, Richards et al. (2008) outlined socioeconomic factors as indicators for success in school. Specifically, Richards et al. (2008) stated that “the two most important socioeconomic variables pertinent to children’s education prospects are parental education and family income” (p. 7). Richards et al. (2008) followed up that intergenerational marginalization of Indigenous communities has led to widespread poverty in those communities, and generally lower family income. They saw this as a main factor contributing to the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ success at school. Richards et al. (2008) attributed a lower family income to a lower level of parental education and as such, “considered [this as] a measure of the knowledge or human capital that family members can bring to bear to help their children’s education progress” (Richards et al., 2008, p. 8). In either case, Battiste (1998, 2013), Kanu (2007), and Richards et al. (2008) all agreed that schools and educators had the duty to support the learning of Indigenous students, in order to improve their success rates in schools.

**French Immersion and Indigenous Education**

French Immersion programs in Canada began around the 1970s, as a way to increase the bilingualism across the national population (Statistics Canada, 2016). French Immersion programs were publicly funded at the provincial and national levels and were available in all provinces and territories in Canada. Students could enter the French Immersion program in Kindergarten, known as early immersion, or they could enter the program in late immersion,
when they reached the middle school level (Makropoulos, 2009). At the time of this research, there were 35,157 students in French Immersion across Canada, with 4,773 in British-Columbia (Statistics Canada, 2016). In British-Columbia, the goal of the French Immersion program was to “provide the opportunity for non-francophone students to become bilingual in English and French. Bilingualism is achieved by providing instruction of the basic curriculum entirely in French during the first years” (Government of British Columbia, 1996).

Friesen and Krauth (2009) conducted research about Indigenous students in BC, using the Foundational Skills Assessment data from students in Grade 4 and 7. Within the data they were using, only 2.4% of Indigenous students were enrolled in French Immersion, as compared to 6.2% non-Indigenous students (Friesen & Krauth, 2009). Their research went on to say that “Aboriginal students perform better when they attend school with a greater proportion of peers who are themselves Aboriginal” (Friesen & Krauth, 2009, p. 3). Peers and the social aspect of schooling as an indicator for success was also discussed by Richards et al. (2008). Their research indicated “strong evidence on the importance of academically stronger students raising the performance of their peers” (Richards et al., 2008, p. 8). This would imply that Indigenous students would perform best in schools where there is a strong community of Indigenous students, and a high level of achievement amongst all students.

Hurdles faced by French Immersion teachers regarding the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, were researched by Coté, a professor at Simon Fraser University. Coté (2017) outlined four main challenges French Immersion teachers face when attempting to embed Indigenous perspectives into the practice. The first was “historical in nature in the sense that all French immersion teachers must recognize that the colonization of Canada was undertaken by the British and the French” (Coté, 2017). The second was around accessibility to the program for
Indigenous students living in rural areas. The third regarded resources and the lack of grade level appropriate French resources based on local Indigenous knowledge. The fourth pertained to training and knowledge for new and experienced teachers in the realm of Indigenous knowledge. The third and fourth findings paralleled the findings of Tait (2010) who conducted research in her school district about teacher’s perceived challenges to integrating Indigenous content into their practice. Tait (2010) found “that access to resources and knowledge of Aboriginal cultures presented barriers to the inclusion of Aboriginal content in the BC curriculum by teachers in School District 68” (Tait, 2010, p. 32). It seems then, that the way forward for educators to implement Indigenous content and culture into their teaching is to examine their own practice and continue to work towards the TRC Calls to Action in education.

**Reflective Practice as a Tool to Improve Teacher Practice**

Reflective practice emerged in the 1980’s and 1990’s as a central component of quality practice among professionals. Loughran (2002) described the different meanings of the term stating that some saw it as simply “thinking about something, whereas for others, it [was] a well-defined and crafted practice that carried[d] very specific meaning and associated action” (p. 33). Harford and Macruairc (2008) added to the definition that “learning was contingent upon the integration of experience with reflection and of theory with practice” (p. 1885). Both groups of researchers indicated that teacher reflective practice was widely incorporated into teacher education programs, as a means to prepare new teachers for the challenges of the role ahead (Harford & Macruaire, 2008; J. J. Loughran, 2002). Loughran (2002) indicated that teacher education programs needed to go beyond encouraging teacher candidates to be reflective, and actually teach the elements of the reflection, which was “the context, the nature of the problem, and the anticipated value of such reflection” (Loughran, 2002, p. 33).
Outside of teacher education programs, reflective practice was also a tool used by many professionals, in different formats. Farrell (2016) researched the use of a peer reflective group for novice teachers. The reflective group “followed a process in which the novice teachers were provided a way to regularly and systematically reflect on their first semester experiences in a supportive, collegial environment that was free from evaluation” (p. 17). The reflective group aided the novice teachers in their first year of practice by connecting them with other people living the same experience. A feeling of isolation within a school was indicated by Harford and Macruairc (2008) as a contributing factor for teachers struggling in the first few years of their career.

Video was another tool used by practitioners seeking to reflect on their practice. As stated by Snyder (2011) using video for reflective practice helped “teachers to examine their own teaching [somewhat] detached from the actual experience and to make the reflective comments of others come to life” (p. 56). Video was put to use by Sydnor (2016), a university supervisor who invited her teacher candidates to video themselves teaching as living evidence of their practice. The video clips allowed teacher candidates to be reflective of their teaching style, lesson flow and classroom management (Sydnor, 2016). Another way video was used came from Harford and Macruairc’s (2008) study of teacher candidates peer-videoing each other. They then used these videos as a way to look back on and reflect about elements of their practice.

Keeping a journal was a common, easy to implement tool, used by practitioners to engage in and record reflections on practice. Miller (2017) described the tool as aiding with “reflection of self that leads to development and growth of judgment, personal values, and critical thinking skills” (p. 39). Miller (2017) also indicated that journals may have guiding questions to promote thoughtful reflection, or may be structured as a freely written narrative. Tsang (2003) conducted
research on the effectiveness of reflective journaling as a tool to help teacher candidates improve their practice. Tsang (2003) found that keeping a journal “foster[ed] teachers’ critical reflectivity over time and promote[d] understanding of the nature, theories, and praxis of teaching” (p. 237). Journaling was one of the main methods I used in this research, with the goal of being reflective of my practice in the area of embeing Indigenous perspectives throughout it.

**Conclusion**

In summary, the history of marginalization of Indigenous people in Canada contributed to many social issues including achievement in school, loss of local languages and suppression of Indigenous cultures. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action and educational transformation, Canada was moving forward towards a more inclusive society which recognized the place and value of Indigenous knowledge. As a result of these Calls to Action, educators were compelled to look at their practice and intentionally work towards integrating Indigenous culture and ways of knowing into their teaching to the benefit for all students. As a result, this study will employ a self-study methodology to examine my own practice with hopes to meet the Calls to Action specific to my professional context.
Chapter 3 – Procedures and Methods

Methodology

In this research, I conducted a self-study of my practice because I was dedicated to strengthening my teaching by bringing Indigenous ways of knowing into my classroom. I strived to improve my practice by critically examining it, and taking action, both as a practitioner and as a researcher. Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009) explained self-study as a systematic way for teachers to “study [their] practice in order to understand, critique, and improve it” (p. 33). Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, and Russell (2004) added that “self-study allows practitioners to engage in inquiry that contributes to their own capacity for expert and caring professional practice while also contributing to the growth of their professions” (p. 307). Going through the process of this study illuminated how I was aligning my practice with the First Peoples Principles of Learning and served as a guide as I moved forward with my intentions to embed Indigenous perspectives into my work.

A main component of self-study is critically reflecting on one’s practice, and taking action. Loughran et al. (2004) explained that for the self-study to be meaningful, “the practice setting must also be framed and reframed in sequences of reflective instances that are responded to with action” (p. 825). The actions taken were directly based on my current context as an early primary French Immersion teacher, because as a researcher studying my own practice I need[ed] to make certain that the data [collected made] visible the context – the fact of being at this place in time, with these particular students, in this setting – as part of data collection as well as in [the] deliberations about data analysis. (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 81)

Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) addressed the fact that self-studies were valuable not only to the
researcher, but served to advance the field as a whole, including the education of teachers. My goal, then, is to not only improve my own practice, but also to start the conversation with other educators about the work of reconciliation in our classrooms.

**Research Design**

This self-study was conducted using a mixed methods design. The mixed method approach was a rigorous way to collect data because “the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, in combination, provide[d] a better understanding of the research problem and questions than either method by itself” (Creswell, 2015, p. 537). Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) added that:

Mixed methods research also is an attempt to legitimate the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining researchers' choices (i.e., it rejects dogmatism). It is an expansive and creative form of research, not a limiting form of research. It is inclusive, pluralistic, and complementary, and it suggests that researchers take an eclectic approach to method selection and the thinking about and conduct of research. (p. 17)

The exploratory sequential design is a systematic way to gather data, by first collecting qualitative data, analyzing it for themes and categories, and then creating a quantitative instrument as a further collection method (Creswell, 2015). This self-study followed the two phase model of the exploratory sequential design. As Creswell (2015) explained, the procedure involved “first gathering qualitative data to explore a phenomenon and then collecting quantitative data to explain the relationships found in the qualitative data” (p. 546). Phase one of this study involved reflective journaling about my daily practice, with detailed weekly reflections about how my practice was aligning with FPPL, and ways I was embedding Indigenous
perspectives into my teaching. This initial phase served to establish the current norm of where I was in my practice, and assured that I was not approaching “the topic with a predetermined set of variables” (Creswell, 2015, p. 547).

The second phase consisted of a daily self-assessment tool, and recording of a daily action, based around my goal of tracking how I was embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my practice. For a two month period between February and March 2019, I used the self-assessment tool daily to collect quantifiable data. This instrument took the form of a checklist, created with the Google Survey platform. Every day my answers to the self-assessment checklist were recorded and stored. These self-assessment results provided concrete quantifiable data on how I was meeting my goal. The daily action was recorded in a word document, and provided additional qualitative data. Timeline of the research was as follows:

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Collection method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September to December</td>
<td>Weekly reflective journals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February to March 2019</td>
<td>Daily self-assessment tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February to March 2019</td>
<td>Daily action recorded</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the completion of the self-assessment and daily action period, data analysis occurred, joining together the findings from the qualitative and quantitative data. Emphasis was given to the qualitative data, as “the intent of the researcher is for the quantitative data results to refine and extend the qualitative findings” (Creswell, 2015, p. 546).

**Research Site**

The research site was a single track French Immersion school in a small city on Northern
Vancouver Island. The school was situated in a diverse neighbourhood with overall low socio-economic status, but as a district Immersion program, students from all over the north side of the district attend this school. Indigenous students made up 17% of the student population at this school, but many Indigenous families chose to send their child to the English school which was further away, where there is an overall population of 75% Indigenous students.

I was the participant of the research, analyzing my own practice through self-study. At the time of this study, I had been an educator for seven years and had been at my current site for four years. I worked as an early primary teacher, alternating between teaching Kindergarten, and Kindergarten and grade 1 combined classes.

**Data Collection**

**Reflective journaling.** Reflective journaling was the method used to collect data in the first phase of this self-study, following the exploratory sequential design (Creswell, 2015). Every week between the months of September and December, I wrote a journal entry reflecting on my practice that week, highlighting areas of alignment with First Peoples Principles of Learning, and the perceived successes and challenges with weaving Indigenous perspectives into my daily classroom teaching. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) emphasized the importance of ongoing reflection during a self-study. They added that “when we design a self-study, we need to make certain that we capture our own voice” and that “our voice, our understandings, and our assumptions pervade our self-study” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 112). Therefore, I used the following questions as prompts for my weekly journal entries:

- What actions did I take this week to align my practice with the First Peoples Principles of Learning?
- How am I weaving Indigenous perspectives into my daily practice?
What were some challenges and successes working within the French Immersion context? These questions allowed me to reflect on my current norms with embedding Indigenous ways of knowing that I could examine further in the second phase of my research.

Hamilton and Pinnegar (2009) also emphasized that it was important that the self-study captures ourselves and our experiences as the researcher. The research journal “includes the details of the day and the events of teaching, along with the reflection upon and the interpretations of practice” (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 2009, p. 124). When done methodically, a research journal can be a rich source of information for a teacher looking to reflect on and improve their practice. Many researchers, including Samaras and Freese (2009), have highlighted the many benefits of teachers applying a reflective lens onto their practice.

**Daily self-assessment tool.** A daily self-assessment tool was used to collect quantitative data during the second phase of the research. Daily self-assessments serve as a way for teachers to set goals and keep track of their progress. Borg and Edmett (2018) found that “by reflecting in a systematic manner on what they know and can do, teachers can become more aware of the range of competences they need and identify appropriate directions for further development” (p. 2). Other researchers in the field believed that consistent self-assessment leads to a higher level of quality practice among teachers (Đekić, Maksimović, & Osmanović, 2018).

The self-assessment instrument used in this research was designed on an online platform that collected, collated, and stored the data. The instrument consisted of 5 questions focused on how and when I was embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my practice. I answered the questions, as well as, completed the daily action recording, every day for a two-month period between February 2019 and March 2019. The questions were as follows:

1. How many times did I specifically talk about Indigenous content today?
2. Which First Peoples Principles of Learning did I specifically target today?

3. Was Indigenous content covered in French or English today?

4. Name the specific situations/contexts in which Indigenous content/perspectives were embedded today.

5. In which curricular areas were Indigenous ways of knowing/content specifically woven in?

6. What specific action did you take today to embed Indigenous ways of knowing into your teaching?

The process of tracking this data involved a detailed daily teaching plan with my annotated notes about situation which occurred throughout the day. At the end of the day I would look back at my notes and fill out the daily assessment tool and record my daily actions.

**Reliability and Validity**

Due to the nature of self-study research, where I as the researcher was also the participant, the reliability and validity of this method required careful examination. Pinnegar and Hamilton (2009) commented that validity in self-study research requires the researcher to be truthful and trustworthy throughout the process. They went on to say that through the “design and analysis” of self-studies, researchers were to “hold high expectations for the integrity and thoroughness” of the work presented (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009, p. 13). By using a mixed method, exploratory sequential design, with two separate data collection methods, I ensured that my research was conducted in a systematic, thorough way, thus increasing the validity of the study.

LaBoskey et al. (2004) stated that for self-studies to be valid and reliable they needed to “make visible data, methods for transforming the data into findings, and the linkages between
data, findings, and interpretations” (p. 1176). I met this criteria for validation by ensuring thorough, precise coding of my journal entries, striving to remove my bias as a reader, and letting the codes emerge naturally from the text. Since the daily assessment tool provided clear, quantitative data, the findings were displayed in detailed charts and graphs. Furthermore, the seven month span of the research, between September and March, provided a reliable account my experiences as teacher reflecting on my practice.

Ethics. I conducted this self-study in an ethical fashion. In my weekly reflective journals, I examined my own practice and feelings around embedding Indigenous knowledge into my classroom. I did not discuss interactions with students or colleagues. If I referred to activities which took place in the classroom, the situation was generalized and did not comment about individuals, rather I commented on my experience with the activity and its connection to my research question. The Research Ethic Board Guidelines for Educators Conducting Research Involving Their Own Students stated that “reflective journaling based upon an educator’s own experiences and perceptions, without reference to either general or specific observation of students, is considered self-study” (Research Ethics Board, n.d.). My self-study was conducted ethically because I limited my data to observations of myself and perceptions of my practice.

In summary, I conducted a systematic self-study following a mixed methods approach. The first phase of data collection took the form of reflective journal entries. The second phase consisted of a daily self-assessment tool, which provided quantitative data, and record of a daily action, for further qualitative data. Throughout the self-study I acted ethically, and thoroughly reviewed my processes to ensure reliability and validity. The next chapter will detail the coding methods that I used and the findings which emerged from the data.
Chapter 4 – Results

The purpose of this research was to study my practice for alignment with the FPPL and discover the ways I was embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my teaching. After the data collection period, I began by analyzing the qualitative data, which came from the weekly reflective journals and the daily action recordings. I used coding as the method of analysis for this data. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) explained that “codes are labels that assign symbolic meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (p. 6). I followed a rigorous, three step coding process outlined by Blair (2015), starting with open coding, moving to axial coding, and finally to thematic coding. The second part of this chapter goes into detail about the quantitative results of the self-assessment tool.

Qualitative Data Analysis

Open coding. During open coding, “the researcher scrutinizes the text and lists the codes as they appear” (Blair, 2015). It was important that in this first round, the self-study researcher lets the codes emerge freely from the text. For the first round of open coding, I read through my twelve journal entries and thirty daily actions an initial time, to familiarize myself with the text, as a few months had elapsed since the creation them. On the second reading, I began to jot down codes on the side of the page as they emerged from the text. Here is a list of the twenty initial codes that emerged: personal learning, emotions, recognition, actions, outdoors, external, language, safe, art, animals, teaching method, personal, inspired, educating myself, conflict, whole school, celebrate, teaching practice, circle and math.

Axial coding. Axial coding draws connections between the initial codes, by relating them together and forming “key codes” (Blair, 2015). To complete this phase of coding, I read through my data a third time. As I was reading, I kept a list of the twenty initial codes alongside my journal entries. If a phrase or word in the data related to one of the initial codes, I put a check
mark beside it and kept reading. For example, on October 9th I wrote, “so far, I am using a lot of English”. When I read that phrase, I put a check mark beside “language”. Another example from an entry on October 28th, were the words “clash” and “contradict” in my journal entry, so I put two check marks beside “conflict”.

After this third reading, I examined my list of initial codes to see which ones had the most check marks, meaning, which ones emerged from the text most often. I discovered the following nine codes had earned the most check marks: personal learning, emotions, language, conflict, animals, circle, outdoors, teaching method and art. Upon examining my initial list of twenty codes, I was able to place them all under the umbrella of one of these nine key codes as detailed in Table 3.

Table 3

*Key Codes and Initial Codes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key codes</th>
<th>Initial codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal learning</td>
<td>Personal, educating myself, teaching practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Recognition, external, inspired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Became a key code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict</td>
<td>Became a key code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Became a key code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Circle</td>
<td>Became a key code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoors</td>
<td>Became a key code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching method</td>
<td>Actions, safe, whole school, celebrate, math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art</td>
<td>Became a key code</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Themes. From the nine key codes developed during the third reading of my data, it was a natural process to organize these codes into three overarching themes. The first theme, “personal learning journey”, arose from the relation of key codes “personal learning”, “emotions” and “conflict”. Next, I combined “teaching method” and “language” to embody a theme relating to implicit teaching methods as they relate to the FPPL, and I named it “teaching style”. Following that was the theme for explicit teaching choices, which encompassed “animals”, “circle”, “outdoors” and “art”. I called this third theme “explicit teaching”. With the three themes in place, I went through the data a fourth time, using my three themes as the template through which to code my writing. Below is the analysis of those themes.

Theme 1 – Personal Learning Journey

When I began this self-study, I was seeking to improve my practice in the specific context of embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my teaching. Given the focus of my research was self-improvement, a substantial focus of my findings discussed my learning journey. As I reviewed the qualitative data, it became apparent that I often described a learning moment, and then followed it up with my feelings about the learning. My feelings fell into two categories, positive or conflicting. Below I discussed the learning moments, followed by a section on the positive emotions, and the moments of conflict.

Learning moments. Throughout the twelve journal entries, I indicated a lot of personal learning around Indigenous culture, history and learning styles. Listed here are some excerpts from my reflective journals which highlighted those learning moments:

This week was Orange Shirt Day at our school. Our school’s Aboriginal Support worker came to my classroom to talk about Orange Shirt Day. I did a lot of learning of my own as I didn’t know what the origin of Orange Shirt day was either. (September 29th, 2018)
I am educating myself and seeking out learning opportunities. I pursued a workshop at UVIC titled “Braiding Indigenous and Western Science.” The workshop outlined a mind shift needed in our current culture. We recognize Indigenous Art, Indigenous language, Indigenous literature, but there doesn’t seem to be a common recognition of Indigenous Science. (October 20th, 2018)

This week Indigenous perspectives were woven into our staff meeting in a meaningful way, we learned as a staff how to play Lahal, otherwise known as the stick game. (November 17th, 2018)

Positive. Many of the learning experiences I described in my data were associated with positive words or illustrated moments where I was happy and engaged in a learning experience. Below are listed some excerpts from my reflective journals and daily actions record exemplifying positive feelings:

Hearing this gave me courage knowing that these topics can be discussed with young learners. (September 29th, 2018)

I was happy to share the art work of Roy Henry Vickers as it is something I love. His gallery in Tofino is awe inspiring every time I visit it. (October 13th, 2018)

I feel proud. (October 20th, 2018) It is very exciting. (November 11th, 2018) Today felt like a success! (February 20th, 2019)
**Conflict.** I observed in my journal entries that I often described moments of internal conflict as I was trying out new ways of aligning my practice with the FPPL or embedding new knowledge into my practice. This is not abnormal for a learning journey, and these moments contributed to strengthening my understanding of the vision I was trying to create for my learners. Moments that demonstrated internal conflict:

*How do I honour time and space for children to discover the world around them when I am limited to bells and time frames.* (October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

*The clash of practice becomes about where we place the importance – on understanding the concepts being presented about these animals, or, on learning these concepts in the language of our program.* (October 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018)

*There is still a disconnect between what I am doing with Indigenous ways of knowing and what I am doing within the French Immersion context.* (November 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2018)

**Theme 2 – Implicit Teaching Style**

The FPPL described ways in which educators could enrich their teaching practice to support an Indigenous learning style, which inevitably supported the learning of all students. A main focus of this self-study was aligning my teaching method with the FPPL. By completing a thorough examination and familiarization with the FPPL, I was able to begin incorporating them into my daily teaching. A common method that appeared in my journaling was the use of a circle to start the day in a holistic way:

*One way that I am honouring local Indigenous ways is by starting each day with a sharing circle. I have an understanding that the circle is a safe, welcoming way to start a
learning experience. The circle is important in many Indigenous communities around where I live. (October 9th, 2018)

Through my weekly reflections and daily actions record, I referred to the use of the sharing circle eight times. This teaching method encompasses the principle that “learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)” (FNESC, 2008).

Another teaching method I used often stemmed from the idea that “learning involves generational roles and responsibilities” (FNESC, 2008). This method is apparent in my journals and daily actions when I organized learning opportunities which involved learning from a “big buddy” in an older grade:

Students had the opportunity to thank the person who has been their big buddy till now.

Buddy activities strengthen the idea of learning from each other and from our elders.

(February 5th, 2019)

As a school we held recognition assemblies every month, based on virtues associated with animals that were gifted to us by a local Indigenous artist. These assemblies fulfilled the principle that “learning requires exploration of one’s identity” and that “learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors” (FNESC, 2008). By recognizing students at these assemblies, I was implicitly modelling a more holistic way of teaching, as seen in this example:

Today’s assembly was about the virtue of kindness as represented by the orca. It was a strong way to honour children for their individual accomplishments in front of their school community. (March 1st, 2019)
Another way I celebrated community was through a shared art project created for the winter concert:

_The art mural represents a village, which is symbolic for our classroom, where each person has an individual contribution, which created the whole. I believe this is teaching through a lens of community, and the lens that we are individuals, but we are strong when we stand together._ (November 24th, 2018)

Through my personal learning during this self-study, and as I brought the knowledge into my practice, I was aware that “learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations” (FNESC, 2008). I noticed in my journals that I often thought about this principle when I was planning an art lesson, and wondered about the use of certain art works, or animal images in my teaching:

_I need to understand that animal crests represented different meanings to different families and cultures around the coast. How do I walk the line of using correct ideology for an animal without incorrectly crossing stories and family knowledge/protected knowledge?_ (October 28th, 2018)

I seem to have answered my own query a few weeks later:

_A few years ago, our Aboriginal Support worker gifted us the images and rights to four animals, created by a family member of hers. Each class was taught about the virtues her family recognizes those animals for. We were given permission by her family to use them in our teaching._ (November 3rd, 2018)
Theme 3 – Explicit Teaching

As I was working on embedding Indigenous perspectives into my teaching, there were many instances where I did so through an explicit lesson which contained Indigenous content. This theme was especially apparent in the daily actions record where many of the actions taken involved a direct learning experience about Indigenous culture, language or history. The explicit teaching moments fell into three distinct groups, animals, art and the outdoors. The next section details these and how they were presented in the data.

**Animals.** It seemed that for the age group I was teaching, younger elementary, an age appropriate, engaging way to facilitate learning about Indigenous perspectives was through animals. On many occasions I referred to lessons in which the main theme was animals and their connection to Indigenous insights:

- *I have been trying to weave the teachings from the book Orca Chief back into the day.*

- *Orcas are an important animal for our region and history.* (November 3rd, 2018)

- *I am learning about the 6 Cedars curriculum which connect Indigenous animal virtues with the core competencies.* (October 28th, 2018)

- *Today I experimented with outdoor learning connected to a literacy unit involving animals and their habitats.* (February 6th, 2019)

**Art.** Another age appropriate and easily accessible way to celebrate Indigenous culture was through learning experiences based around Indigenous art and artists. This theme was quite prevalent within the explicit teaching moments both in my weekly journals and daily actions
records. Below are some examples of where I used art as part of math lessons and visual art lessons to embed Indigenous perspectives into my practice:

**Visual art:**

*This week I was inspired by the art work of Roy Henry Vickers to create a visual art lesson about colour blocking. (October 13th, 2018)*

*Ted Harrison was a Canadian artist who was in touch with the land and the people who lived on it. He serves as a great inspiration for colourful art work. (February 7th, 2019)*

**Math connection:**

*Today felt like a success! I went out on a limb and included Indigenous content into a math lesson. As a way to illustrate doubles and symmetry, I used an image of a button blanket. (February 20th, 2019)*

*I revisited the idea of symmetry within the button blanket during a math lesson. I used a different image this time and made connections to the associated animal crests. [...] Repeating this activity strengthens the connection I am trying to make of using Indigenous art in my math teaching. (February 22nd, 2019)*

**Outdoors.** Many of the explicit teaching moments I reflected on took place outdoors. This was a meaningful way to connect students with the land, while having an authentic place-based learning experience. I was fortunate that my work site was situated right near two forests and outdoor learning time was a priority detailed on our school success plan. Valuable learning
occurred in the forest, as highlighted in these examples from my journals and daily actions record:

As a school we took a walk on the local trail. This gave learners and teachers the opportunity to connect with each other, as well as with the place in which we all work and play. (September 29th, 2018)

The forest is where I teach my students about seasonal changes. In the future, I would like to be able to teach my students the Kwakwala name for leaves and maples leaves. (October 28th, 2018)

It was too beautiful of a day not to spend the afternoon outside. Nature is our teacher and I took this opportunity to let kids be kids and play communally in the sunny forest. (March 7th, 2019)

As a school we took a field trip to the beach, the best place to learn outdoors! Students were exploring tide pools, crabs, and other creatures as they watched the tide come in. (March 15th, 2019)

The findings in the qualitative data provide a rich picture of my journey from September to March as I studied my practice for alignment with the FPPL and recorded actions taken to embed Indigenous knowledge and teaching styles into my daily teaching. The following section will cover the quantitative data which complements this qualitative section.
Quantitative Data Analysis

The quantitative data collected for this self-study was in the format of a daily self-assessment tool, which I completed daily for the span of February 2019 and March 2019. I created the self-assessment using the Google Forms tool, located on the Google Drive platform. The online tool stored the responses and aided in the compilation of the data. Overall, I responded to the self-assessment 26 out of a possible 30 times. The discrepancy is due to situations out of my control, such as snow days and sick days. This section analyzes the survey question by question to pull out relevant themes and information.

Question 1. How many times did I specifically talk about Indigenous content today?

To answer this question, I had to select a number between one and five. Table 4 details how many times per day I specifically spoke about Indigenous content.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is apparent from this table that specifically talking about Indigenous content with my students was not a predominant part of my teaching, as the majority of days I only referred to Indigenous content once. As seen in the qualitative data, there were daily instances of using a teaching style modelled on the FPPL, I can infer that on days where I only spoke about Indigenous content once specifically, I was still embedding Indigenous perspectives into my teaching style in a meaningful way.
I was struck that on only 16% of days, which represented four days, during the data collection period, I spoke specifically about Indigenous content three times throughout the day. As I examined the data more closely, I was able to extrapolate that this occurred on the 12th, 14th, 16th and 17th days. This led me to believe that using the daily self-assessment tool actually served as a reminder, and as encouragement to include specific Indigenous content into my daily teaching.

When looking at the “four times” and “five times” column, I did not feel discouraged that I scored zero in these two categories. Early primary programs are play based in nature, and offer many inquiry driven experiences where children are exploring through their interactions with each other, and with the material. As a result, structured lessons where the teacher is imparting knowledge and the students are actively listening are limited to a few key times throughout the day. When looking at the structure of my program, there are three times in a day when the children are gathered on the carpet for a learning activity, and rarely four or five. In retrospect this question in the assessment tool could have been answered with the choices: one to three +.

**Question 2. Which First Peoples Principles of Learning did I specifically target today?** The question was laid out as a list of the nine principles, including a tenth option of none, to account for days I did not use any of the principles. I was able to select multiple principles for each day. Table 5 details the amount of times over the entire data collection period that I selected each principle.
Table 5

*First Peoples Principles of Learning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Peoples Principle of Learning</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Learning involves patience and time.</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Learning requires exploration of one’s identity.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. None</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principle 1 and principle 7 were selected the most often, on 22 out of 26 days. Principle 2 came in only one point behind. Principles 1, 2 and 7 embodied the nature of an early primary classroom in which students are learning holistically through play and inquiry. As mentioned in my qualitative data, the connection to the school community and the community at large is an important aspect of my practice, and is reflected in Principle 1. Principle 7 refers to patience and time, which are essential qualities for any teacher, especially early primary teachers in the spring.
Question 3. Was Indigenous content covered in French or English today? The choices laid out for this question were English, French or both. The results were almost even across the 26 entries in the self-assessment tool. Table 6 details the findings.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Used</th>
<th>French</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going into the self-study, I was under the impression that I was only going to cover this content in English, due to the young age of my learners, and my comfort with the topics in French. The data showed I was actually covering the material in both languages, and this was a pleasant finding, as I was dedicated to educating my young learners in the language of the program.

Question 4. Name the specific situations or contexts in which Indigenous content or perspectives were embedded today. This question had the purpose of helping me track the learning contexts in which meaningful connections were being made to Indigenous knowledge throughout the day. I used my observations from the early qualitative data to create a list of contexts in which I thought connections would be made. I also added “other” as an optional choice in case there was a context I had not predicted. Table 7 summarizes the situations or contexts, and the occurrence of their selection. This question allowed multiple selections per day.
The answers in Question 4 align with my qualitative data, in that a major theme of my journal entries was the implicit teaching styles modeled on the FPPL. The FPPL option was chosen 18 times in the self-assessment tool, which represented 70% of the days during the data collection period. The fact that teaching style modeled on FPPL was chosen the most was an interesting follow up from Question 1, where I saw that on many days I only spoke about specific Indigenous content once. It was heartening to realize that even though I may not have done an explicit lesson on content, I was still embedding the FPPL into my practice, on most days.
Question 5. In which curricular areas were Indigenous ways of knowing/content specifically woven in? This question aimed to illustrate trends in the curricular areas where I was having success with my goal of integrating the Indigenous content. Again, I chose subject areas for this question that were emerging from my early journal entries as possible areas of connection. I included the “other” option as I knew my list was limited. I was able to select multiple answers to this question. Table 8 details the findings.

Table 8

Curricular Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curricular area</th>
<th>Occurrence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Literacy</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Math</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social studies</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sciences</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical education</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morning circle</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buddy activity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtues assembly</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral story telling</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

My observations of this table is that the answers I included in the “other” category could have been grouped into a category that already existed in the chart, or the chart needed another
option, such as personal and social responsibility. Personal and social responsibility are important themes in the early primary grades and “morning circle”, “buddy activity” and “virtues assembly” could have fit under that umbrella theme. Also, “oral story telling” can go with “literacy” which is already and option. Looking at the data, there was an even spread amongst literacy, math and sciences, with art and P.E. coming in with lower numbers of occurrence.

In summary, the three main themes that emerged in the qualitative data were supported by the findings in the quantitative results as well. The next chapter will further discuss my findings and their connections to relevant research in the field.
Chapter 5 – Conclusions

Summary

Born out of the understanding that education was a meaningful way forward for reconciliation within Canada, I conducted a systematic self-study of my practice to examine how I was embedding Indigenous ways of knowing into my teaching. I also chronicled my journey as an early primary French Immersion teacher as I tried to aligning my practice with the First Peoples Principles of Learning. The first phase of the self-study involved weekly reflective journals which took place between September and December 2018. During the second phase of the self-study between February and March 2019, I completed a daily self-assessment tool, and recorded a daily action, based on my goals of including Indigenous content and ways of knowing into my practice.

Data analysis occurred in March 2019 and began with coding of the qualitative data provided by the weekly journals and the daily actions record. Open and axial coding were used to extract main themes from the data. Once three main themes were established, the data was coded once again using the themes as a template. The quantitative data was analyzed for themes and connections to the qualitative findings. The next section discusses the connections drawn between both data sources and the existing literature in the field.

Discussion

Personal learning journey. This theme emerged originally in the qualitative data and carried over into the quantitative findings. Personal learning happened on many different levels during this self-study, starting with personal learning around the actual method and research design. Conducting the literature review was also a beneficial learning experience to educate myself further about the history and culture of Indigenous people in Canada.
In the analysis of the qualitative data, I outlined instances of personal learning where I was seeking professional development around Indigenous knowledge in order to better serve my students and improve my practice. In Chapter 2, I outlined some studies (Coté, 2017; Tait, 2010) conducted on the topic of perceived barriers teachers faced in incorporating Indigenous knowledge into their teaching. Both Tait (2010) and Coté (2017) discussed that the lack of knowledge of Indigenous cultures and histories, was seen by some teachers as a barrier to teaching in a style modelled on Indigenous ways of knowing. After completing this self-study, I comprehend the intricacies of this perceived barrier. Although the extensive time I have spent exploring this subject has buoyed my confidence with incorporating Indigenous knowledge into my teaching, it has also highlighted the importance of continued growth and learning I require as an educator for reconciliation.

The quantitative data collected through the self-assessment tool provided a clear picture of the growth along the learning journey. When looking at the 26 entries of the self-assessment tool, it was apparent that in the later portion of the collection period, I was directly incorporating more Indigenous content then at the forefront of my teaching. For example, during the last two weeks of using the self-assessment tool, I incorporated Indigenous content two and three times almost every day. I believe this is because the act of filling out the self-assessment was serving as a reminder and as motivation to include the content more often. As Miller (2017) and Loughran (2002) discussed in their research, engaging in reflective practice, such as partaking in a self-assessment, leads to developing a stronger teaching practice that is continually being refined. I definitely felt that having this lens on my practice for the months of my research strengthened my teaching overall and I would recommend this experience to any educators looking to familiarize themselves with their practice.
Teaching style. The goal of this self-study was to align my teaching practice with the FPPL. As indicated in the research, these principles were co-created by Indigenous knowledge keepers and FNESC to provide a path towards a more holistic approach to education, which honoured the Indigenous perspective. Throughout the qualitative data collection period, my journal entries described my experiences of making implicit connections to the FPPL, such as, beginning the day with a sharing circle and honouring student accomplishments at virtues assemblies. Kanu (2007) discussed how, in a classroom seeking to support Indigenous learners, “stories were used to enhance students’ understanding of curriculum content; sharing/talking circles were used to facilitate discussion on an equal, respectful, and nonthreatening basis” (p. 30). Halbert and Kaser (2015) reminded educators “to consider the ways in which [the FPPL] apply not only to First Nations learners, but also to all learners, regardless of culture or background” (p. 207). Therefore, the implicit teaching style choices I was making were serving my learners’ best interests, whether they were Indigenous or not.

It was highlighted in the self-assessment tool that I had used a teaching style modeled on the FPPL 18 out of 26 days. The tool also illustrated that I used the principles based on a holistic approach to teaching and supporting the well-being of the individuals and the community, most often. It should also be mentioned that I repeatedly chose the principle “Learning involves patience and time” (FNESC, 2008) and that most days as an early primary teacher, I needed to remind myself of this. Chrona (2014) goes into detail about this principle in that it “directly supports the idea that learning is an individualistic process that cannot be rushed or arrived at according to a pre-determined schedule” (2014, para. 1). Looking back at the journal entries, I saw instances where I was wrestling with schedules and structures as I tried to deliver holistic,
experiential learning activities for my young learners. A next step would be to mesh the FPPL with the structure of the school day, to best support this type of learning.

**Explicit teaching.** The TRC called for an inclusion of the contributions that Indigenous people have made to our collective knowledge as part of a transformation of the education system (TRC, 2015). Battiste (2002, 2013) spoke about the need to decolonize education, and called to “Canadian administrators and educators to respectfully blend Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy with Euro-Canadian epistemology and pedagogy to create and innovative ethical, trans-systemic Canadian education system” (Battiste, 2013, p. 168). I contributed to this decolonized vision of education by explicitly teaching my students about Indigenous content in multiple curricular areas. By including images of button blankets in my math lessons on symmetry and doubles, I was making the choice to celebrate an Indigenous art form, instead of selecting a generic image to demonstrate the concept. Furthermore, as seen in both data sets, the use of art was an age appropriate, engaging way to honour Indigenous heritage. Yahgulanaas (2015) described art as a powerful way to connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, to move forward with reconciliation. I will continue to use this medium as an explicit way to teach my young learners about Indigenous perspectives.

**Next steps**

The results of this self-study showed that with dedication and willingness to examine my practice, and constant reflection on my goal of embedding Indigenous perspectives, I was able to meaningfully improve my practice over the data collection period. Moving forward, I have identified areas to explore for further connection to the FPPL, such as classroom management and the Core Competencies. Towards the end of the data collection period, I was introduced to *The Six Cedar Trees* by Margot Landahl, a resource about the BC Core Competencies and their
connection to local animals of the North West coast. This incredible resource provides an engaging framework for educators and is illustrated with Indigenous art. I am also looking at using *The Six Cedar Trees* to guide a holistic approach to classroom management through its teachings about animal characteristics and personal responsibility.

Ultimately, I would like to open up the conversation, and invite my French Immersion colleagues to join me on the learning journey of transforming our program. I would like to start the conversation about how we are embedding Indigenous perspectives into classrooms, and what our next steps are. A tangible step in that direction would be committing to learning together about using *The Six Cedar Trees* to teach Core Competencies and aid with classroom management.

**Conclusion**

Canada is moving forward with reconciliation, and day by day, Indigenous knowledge is being recognized and celebrated by our country. Meaningful ground work is being done by educators to inform the next generation, in order to transform the future of our societies. Conducting this self-study during a time of educational transformation in British Columbia was inspiring, and demonstrated my commitment as an educator to supporting the goals of the new educational movement. I am not alone in striving to embed Indigenous knowledge into my teaching, as many educators around me are embarking on a similar journey. The rich supports available at the local and provincial level are constantly evolving and becoming increasingly accessible to all educators.

Stepping back and looking at the bigger picture, I see that this self-study taught me the ways in which I can reflect on and improve my practice. The educational transformation is widespread and I am only a small part of it. As I conclude this learning journey, I am thinking of
The Little Hummingbird story by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas (2008), in which a hummingbird does its part to drop water on a fire as the other animals look on. When the other animals ask the hummingbird what she is doing, she says “I am doing what I can.” With this research, I am doing what I can to improve my practice, and carry forward the messages of reconciliation, towards a brighter future for all.
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