How Can the Circle of Courage be Used to Improve Student Behaviour?

by

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Abstract

With escalations of challenging student behaviour in K-7 schools, the result of unmet social-emotional needs, educators are looking for ways to best support these students. For this reason, schools are trying a variety of methods to improve challenging behaviours using behaviour intervention programs, social-emotional learning and character/virtues education. This major project involved a review of literature and exploration to identify a model that could be used to support educators in improving challenging behaviour. The model I chose was the Circle of Courage as created by Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (2002). The outcome of this qualitative study was the creation of a professional development workshop using the Adaptive Schools (AS) (Garmston & Wellman, 2018) strategies to provide teachers with an experiential understanding of the value and processes of collaborative inquiry and Indigenous approaches to child development, as based on the Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 2000). Their model addresses four key values that both rely upon and ensure the ongoing development of positive relationships to ensure well-being. It is my hope and intention that the professional development workshop will be a valuable resource for educators who are committed to creating positive school climates that foster healthy relationships for students and the entire school community.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research has consistently shown that positive relationships are foundational to creating school climates that support learning and wellbeing (Lei, Cui, & Chiu, 2016). However, escalations of challenging student behaviour, often a symptom of lack of connectedness for students (Graham, Powell, & Truscott, 2016), and teacher burnout, often caused by poor school climates and challenging student behaviour (Tsouloupas, Carson, Matthews, Grawitch, & Barber, 2010), are evident in many K-7 public schools. The poor school climate is associated with high absenteeism, violence, and bullying, substance abuse, and reduced academic achievement (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Alessandro, 2013). In addition, an increasing number of youths are facing mental health issues (Aldridge & McChesney, 2018) while preparing for success in a constantly changing 21st-century workplace (OECD, 2010). Each of these challenging factors supports the need for a more holistic approach to education, one that focuses on the whole child (Borkar, 2016) rather than just academics. “Improvement efforts need to explicitly recognize and address the social, emotional, ethical and civic as well as academic dimensions of school life” (NSCC, 2007).

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child. (Carl Jung, 1875-1961, as cited from quotemaster.org, n.d., para. 1)

Over the span of my 28-year teaching career, I have had many roles, including teaching classes of students in grades 1-11, English language learners, students requiring learning assistance and alternate programs, and being Teacher-in-Charge. I have taught in many schools within four districts across Western BC, each with its own distinct
population (multicultural, Indigenous, high/low socio-economic, etc.); yet, never before had I been faced with such challenging student behaviour that interfered with student learning. Many of my colleagues were also struggling to find ways to cope with their frustrations and often felt unsupported and ineffective working with children who had such challenging behaviours. However, I knew from experience that not all schools were in a state where students and staff felt this defeated and hopeless. These disruptive conditions caused me to question what was occurring at this school and others like it, and what, if anything, could be done to improve student behaviour. This inquiry led me on a search and review of literature on school climate or antecedents of poor student behaviour and relationships, seeking to understand what others have tried.

While exploring various forms of literature on relationships and positive school climates, I landed on Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern’s (2002) work, which uses the Indigenous Medicine Wheel to represent its philosophy. The four quadrants of the wheel have sacred meaning to “Native people who see the person as standing in a circle surrounded by the four directions,” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 45). The Circle of Courage model seemed to address the very issues my colleagues and I were experiencing and showed how the authors and school that used this model achieved success by focusing on building positive, nurturing relationships within the school community. Brendtro et al. (2002) proposed that all four values of an individual’s circle (Sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity) must be intact to have a balanced life, and that a lack of strength in any of them will result in emotional, social, and behavioural challenges (Gauthier, 1980, as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 44). To increase my knowledge of the Circle of Courage, I focused mainly on the literary work of Brendtro et al. (2002) in this Major Project; however, I explored other frameworks and models in the literature.
**Purpose of this Project**

This Master of Education in Educational Leadership Major Project focuses on exploring how using the Circle of Courage model, designed by Bendtro et al. (2002), might serve to improve student behaviour and school climate by nurturing positive relationships in the school environment. I identify and elaborate upon what their research states as essential and compare it to the research of others who have studied the key issues that contribute to negative student behaviours and exacerbate challenges that teachers commonly face in elementary schools. I also compare this model to several current educational frameworks or models that are taking precedence in our classrooms in efforts to improve student learning. Thus, in this Major Project, I primarily address the four values of the Circle of Courage as a means to improve student behaviour and school climate.

To find out what the Circle of Courage looked like in action, I visited sites where the Circle of Courage philosophy was embedded in the school culture. For example, Robron Centre, in Campbell River, BC, is an alternative school that uses Circle of Courage language, celebration, and artifacts to engage and support their learners. In addition, I interviewed educators from the NIDES Navigate program, in Comox, BC, who apply Circle of Courage values in their daily teaching practices. I also attended a keynote presentation and workshop by Monique Gray Smith to learn more about Indigenous perspectives on child development, and researched how Circle of Courage values are used to guide the Whole School Independent School in Slocan, BC.

Using the Circle of Courage (Bendtro et al., 2002) is typically focused on addressing students’ needs; however I noted that there is also the potential of developing in teachers a stronger sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity. Based on this model, I will
design an experiential learning workshop using Adaptive Schools’ strategies (Garmston & Wellman, 2016) to help teachers explore these Indigenous perspectives on child development. Participating in engaging, interactive workshop activities, teachers will themselves experience feelings of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity and understand how similar activities can benefit their own students.

**Justification of the Project**

Finding ways to create a more positive school climate is very important. A positive school climate is critical for creating the conditions for optimum learning and equity, conditions that ensure physical and social-emotional safety, foster healthy and supportive relationships, include diverse methods of teaching and learning, and provide a supportive physical environment that includes adequate resources and supplies (Thapa et al., 2013). The World Health Organization’s (WHO) Psycho-Social Environment Profile (2003) identified wellbeing and happiness, improved sense of belonging, and better quality of life as advantages of a positive school environment. Students in schools with positive climates and relationships tend to exhibit desirable behaviours because they feel safe, connected and valued, whereas students in schools with negative climates and relationships are more likely to experience bullying and harassment, injury, truancy and absenteeism, fear, anxiety, depression, and loss of motivation (Brendtro et al., 2002).

Students learning in a supportive and caring environment where they feel a sense of attachment will develop resilience and self-worth (Brokenleg & Long, 2013), providing sound foundations for positive mental health in later adolescence and adulthood (WHO, 2003). While it is simpler to blame parents, technology, colleagues, and even children for negative student behaviours, efforts should be focused on improving learning environments. Addressing the
challenging behaviours before they have a chance to occur ensures environments are conducive
to learning and wellbeing (Brendtro et al., 2002).

Because students spend a significant portion of their time in school, educators are in an
optimal position for making a difference in the lives of children. Teachers have the ability to
create environments that not only foster a love for learning but also provide opportunities for
students to establish and maintain positive relationships, have respect for themselves, others and
the environment, and develop skills that will help them contribute to society in positive ways.
Educators have an important role to play in providing experiences that make students feel
connected to their schools and communities and develop a sense of belonging and empowerment
that will help K-7 students cope with the conflicts, demands, and pressures they will undoubtedly
face in adolescence and adulthood. It is essential for students to make good choices, develop
confidence and resilience, feel positive about their futures and valued by society. They must be
equipped with the skills and attitudes necessary to be successful learners, not just to achieve
academically, but to help them lead happy, fulfilling lives.

Why Indigenous Philosophies?

There is currently an upsurge/resurgence in Indigenous philosophies that are meant to
address students’ needs but are possibly equally applicable to addressing teachers’ learning
needs. For example, the BC Ministry of Education partnered with the First Nations Education
Steering Committee (FNESC) to create the First Peoples Principles of Learning in 2008 (Chrona,
2014; FNESC, n.d.).

Current necessary changes (SET-BC, 2018) in K-7 curriculum and pedagogy are
influenced and informed by the OECD’s Seven Principles of Learning as reported in The Nature
of Learning: Using Research to Inspire Practice (OECD, 2010), BC’s New Curriculum
(BC Ministry of Education, 2015, 2018) and First Peoples’ Principles of Learning (Chrona, 2014; FNESC, n.d.), all of which require a more relational, collaborative, identity and inquiry-based approach to teaching and learning that the wisdom and core principles of Indigenous philosophies provide. This increased emphasis on relationship, personalization, and the recognition of the importance of paying attention to more aspects of self, while developing and maintaining positive relationships with others may be new to the BC curriculum, but it is certainly not new to Indigenous peoples (Child & Benwell, 2015; Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017).

**Why the Circle of Courage?**

The Circle of Courage is a holistic approach to child development that focuses on the overall wellbeing of children. It is a way of thinking and being, rather than a set of strategies and methods. It combines the wisdom of Indigenous cultures with contemporary research to address four values: sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Brendtro et al., 2002). Many schools are choosing to use the Circle of Courage as an educational compass (Ashworth, n. d., p. 34). Research on effective schools has shown that a key characteristic is the creation of a total school environment rather than adopting isolated practices (Brendtro et al., 2002). I was interested to learn that each of the four values directly impacts student behaviour and that many of the values align with BC’s New Curriculum (2015, 2018). All of this is promising; however, it becomes apparent there is a gap in the new curriculum in its neglect to include positive school climate and the impact it has on student success and wellbeing. Failure to acknowledge the important role that relationships have in creating resilience and self-worth in students is problematic when we are beginning to understand that students’ emotional needs must be met before learning can take place (OECD, 2010; 2019).
Research Question

My discovery of the lack of emphasis on positive relationships and school climate in the BC Curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2015, 2018) eventually led to my decision to develop a professional development workshop for teachers that would support them on improving student behaviour using the Circle of Courage. Thus, I came to formulate my research question, which is: How can the Circle of Courage be used to improve school climate and student behaviour?

Definition of Terms

There are several terms used in this Major Project that require definition as there are multiple definitions or vague definitions within the literature for each of the terms. To ensure clarity and transparency, I define these core constructs and terms as follows.

**Positive school climate.** The literature is unclear about its definitions of school climate (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). Cohen et al. (2009) believed it is this inconsistency in definition, policy and measurement that, despite the evidence that shows the benefits of positive school climate, prevents current practice from reflecting the research.
School culture often refers to an established set of values and policies designed for school efficiency and goals, whereas school climate is perception-based, referring to the perceived quality of relationships within the school and the individual experiences and feelings that students, teachers and staff have about the school (BC Ministry of Education, 2012). “Climate” is a term commonly used in education today, also referring to world climate and climate change. For the sake of this paper, I will use the term climate rather than culture since this project is about student behaviour and relationships and the changes we need to see for sustainability, whereas culture relates to the operations and policies of the school.

**Positive relationship.** When using the term positive relationship, I am referring to relationships between two or more individuals that are built on love, caring, emotional safety, trust and respect (Wentzel, Battle, Russell, & Looney, 2010). While most educators are aware of the importance of teacher-student relationships (Voisin, Salazar, Crosby, Diclemente, Yarber, & Staples-Horne, 2005), this project considers all relationships in the school community to be significant (i.e., peer, staff, parent, administration, elders, and other community members) (Vollet, Kindermann, & Skinner, 2017). Each type of relationship contributes to the self-worth of students and deserves individual attention. In this project, if a specific type of relationship is not identified, the term positive relationships refers to all of those previously listed.

**Indigenous.** Indigenous is a term used to encompass a variety of Aboriginal groups. It broadly refers “to peoples of long settlement and connections to specific lands who have been adversely affected by incursions by industrial economies, displacement and settlement of their traditional territories by others” (Indigenous Foundations, 2009). In Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our hope for the Future, Brendtro et al. (2002) referred to Indigenous or Aboriginal peoples as Native Americans. However, because some Canadians feel the word “Native” has a negative
connotation and is outdated (Indigenous Foundations, 2009), I will replace their term with the term Indigenous throughout this Major Project.

**Indigenous philosophy.** Brendtro et al. (2002) defined Native American or Indigenous philosophies of child management and development as an approach that emerges from cultures where the central purpose of life was education and empowerment of children. It is a holistic approach that focuses on self-worth and resilience (Brendtro et al., 2002), and the emphasis it places on their wellbeing (care, love, safety) is paramount. For the sake of this paper, I refer specifically to child development theories by Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (2002) in the Circle of Courage as well as those underpinning BC’s First Peoples Principles of Learning (Chrona, 2014; FNESC, n.d.). Although Dr. Brokenleg is from the Native American Lakota tribe, he has done extensive work in schools and communities in British Columbia. In addition, there are components of British Columbia’s new school curriculum that align with Circle of Courage values (Sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity). For example, Indigenous philosophies encourage consideration of First Peoples perspectives in specific content areas and the Personal and Social Competencies (BC Ministry of Education, 2018) address students’ identity and the needs for caring and having purpose in the world. First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, n.d.) is an example of Indigenous philosophy about education that acknowledges education and learning as a complex process that is personal, holistic, embedded in relationship to each other, to self, and to the land, and is most effective when it is authentic and relevant (Chrona, 2014; FNESC, n.d.).

**Brief Overview of Chapters**

Chapter 1: The Introduction defines positive school climate, Indigenous philosophies, and their influence on student wellbeing and success. I provide my motivation for this study, my
chosen framework, my research question and justification for my choices of key constructs for
the literature review, and my approach. I point out that relationships and positive school climate
are essentially synonymous with Circle of Courage values and that a positive correlation between
quality of relationships and student behaviours exists (Lei et al., 2016). I explore values of the
Circle of Courage model for child development (sense of belonging, mastery, independence and
generosity) and address the need for positive relationships in school communities to ensure
positive student behaviour and wellbeing. Finally, I suggest that many, but not all, aspects of
BC’s New Curriculum align with Indigenous philosophy and I identify flaws in the curriculum.

Chapter 2: The Literature Review covers the extent of my research on the value of
relationships within school communities and how these relationships affect student behaviour. It
also demonstrates that experiences based on Circle of Courage values (sense of belonging,
mastery, independence and generosity) help build these positive relationships, and describes
practices implemented by educators that support Indigenous child-rearing philosophies.
Furthermore, gaps in BC’s new curriculum and the implications for education are explained in
this chapter more thoroughly.

Chapter 3: The Design Process will explain why I chose to develop a professional
development workshop for teachers and reasons for using the Adaptive Schools’ format to
facilitate this learning. I will describe and justify why specific presentation strategies were
chosen and demonstrate how they connect to Circle of Courage philosophies.

Chapter 4: The Design Project outlines the Adaptive Schools workshop. It includes
lesson plans for the workshop with objectives, descriptions, rationales, lists of materials, and
approximate durations for the activities. Additional materials including Spirit Page, West Coast
Animal Cards, and Jigsaw Activity will also be attached (in the Appendix) along with links and Key Note presentation slides that support the Design Project.

Chapter 5: The Conclusion will summarize what I have learned from the Design Process and identify the limitations of the Design Project. I will discuss the implications of the Design Project. Finally, I will include an action plan that demonstrates the practicality of the Design Project and make recommendations for further implementation.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

“Be related, somehow, to everyone you know” (Deloria, 1943, in Brendtro, et al., 2002, p. 46).

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an overview of the key literature that I explored as it relates to the guiding question, “How can student behaviour be improved by using the Circle of Courage?” While I explore the implications of introducing Indigenous philosophies to address improving student behaviour in schools, I specifically focus on the Circle of Courage model (2002) as created by Brendtro et al. (2002). I consider other frameworks and research models that align with the key principles; however, I am comparing them to the Circle of Courage as that is the primary focus of my project.

I demonstrate the correlation between quality of relationships within the school community and student behaviour. Thus, in this chapter I provide research and evidence to show how the Circle of Courage can be used to improve student behaviour through providing experiences for students that make them feel cared for, valued, and respected.

Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern (2002) took an interesting approach to understanding today’s youth in North America. They combined the work of European youth work pioneers and Indigenous philosophies to explain how society—parents, schools, and community—has negatively impacted the social and emotional health of children. However, rather than focus on the negative traits of children who have been affected or alienated, Brendtro et al. (2002) addressed the environment that has impacted the four worlds of childhood (family, school, peers, and work). They blame the “hazards of destructive relationships, climates of futility, learned irresponsibility and loss of purpose” (Brendtro et al., 2002). Taking these four hazards into consideration, along with the goal of fostering self-worth and resiliency in our
youth, Brendtro et al. (2002) developed the Circle of Courage. The Circle of Courage consists of four values that defeat these hazards: Belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity (Brendtro et al., 2002). They together form the unifying theme that is essential for positive school climates and the healthy relationships that improve student behaviour.

“When a flower doesn’t bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower.” Alexander Den Heijer (alexanderdenheijer.com, 2016)

In Chapter 1, I introduced the concept of positive school climate and the impact of relationships on student behaviour. In the following sections, (1) I outline a brief history of school climate research and reemphasize its importance to overall wellbeing and success. (2) I describe more fully the Circle of Courage model and its four values (sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity), which foster positive relationships to improve student behaviour. (3) I discuss the indicators and exemplars of schools with positive relationships with respect to the four values, and the implications for education, and (4), I show how the Circle of Courage aligns with BC’s new curriculum and also point out the curriculum’s shortfalls in neglecting to stress the importance of nurturing relationships and developing positive school climates within school communities. I will also compare the OECD’s Seven Principles of Learning (2010) and the First Peoples Principles of Learning (Chrona, 2014; FNESC, n.d.) with the Circle of Courage (2002) to indicate where they align and where they miss. Finally, I raise the idea that innovative ways of learning may be new to the BC curriculum, but they are not new to Indigenous people. I propose that the apparent failure to acknowledge that the core competencies are essentially based on Indigenous ways of knowing and being is a major
deficiency. Finally, I show the implications for applying this knowledge and information to develop sound educational practices.

School Climate

School climate is the “quality and character of school life” (NSCC, 2007, p. 5). It focuses on the perceived quality of the relationships within the school community, between and among students and adults (Expect Respect and a Safe Education (ERASE), 2017). The climate of the school can be likened to the personality of an individual (Halpin & Croft, 1962) in that both schools and people are defined by their characteristics and the overall feeling they produce when one comes in contact with them.

Quality of leadership, parent involvement, relationships, teacher wellbeing, teacher collaboration, professional development, physical environment, and clearly defined school rules and expectations are important elements of school climate that have been recognized for decades (Perry, 1925, as cited in Cohen et al., 2009, p. 181). Yet one of the most critical components of school climate was recognized as the care for students by protecting and developing their physical, mental, and moral needs (Perry, 1925, as cited in Cohen et al., 2009). It was not until the mid century, however, that educators began to systemically study school climate (NSCC, 2007). Then, in the 1980s and 90s, empirical studies on school climate became more prevalent because of the interest and association with student achievement (Thapa, Cohen, Guffey, & Alessandro, 2013). Academic achievement continues to guide much of the research and curricular goals today.

A positive school climate is one that “fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing and satisfying life in a democratic society” (Halpin & Croft, 1962, p. 4). Having a positive school climate motivates students to do well academically and to be life-
long learners, while providing a safe physical environment that supports learning and in which students feel respected and connected to others (NSCC, 2007). A school with a positive climate engages teachers and students in meaningful work and promotes “the social, civic, emotional, and ethical as well as cognitive skills and dispositions that provide the foundation for learning and effective participation in democracy” (NSCC, 2007, p. 5).

Although it is well documented that positive school climate and academic achievement are associated (Davis & Warner, 2018), there is a significant body of research that attests to the developmental benefits of positive school climate. As a result, an increasing number of schools and school districts – not to mention the OECD (2019) – are growing concerned with student mental health and are focusing their attention on improving school climate, specifically as it relates to wellbeing and resilience (Aldridge, Fraser, Fozdar, Ala’i, Earnest, & Afari, 2016). Bullying and other forms of violence are major issues in schools today, including my own. Research has shown that schools with positive climates have fewer suspensions and disciplinary incidents (Huang & Cornell, 2018), especially those related to bullying (Eliot, Cornell, Gregory, & Fan, 2010). According to Eliot et al. (2010), students in supportive, caring environments are less likely to be victims of bullying and are also more willing to report an incident. Therefore, it stands to reason that programs that support student emotional wellbeing and positive school climate (i.e., Social-Emotional Learning Programs, Positive Behaviour Interventions, Character and Virtues Education) are popular.

Since positive relationships are a key component of positive school climates, and evidence supports that a sense of belonging is the most significant value in the Circle of Courage model, and is a product of positive relationships, I have chosen to describe relationships in greater depth in the following section.
According to the Circle of Courage, if the optimal learning conditions and experiences of a positive school climate do not exist, students will lack self-worth and be susceptible to social, psychological, and learning problems (Brendtro et al., 2002, as cited in Ashworth, n. d., p. 25). The understanding that sense of belonging, or connectedness, emerges from the care, trust and respect received from teachers, peers, families and community members, should be the driving force that motivates districts to pay close attention to relationships and school climate. However, the lack of emphasis on relationships in the school environment is one of the flaws I identify in BC’s New Curriculum (2018).

**The Circle of Courage – An Indigenous Philosophy on Child Development**

The Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 2002) is a model based on centuries-old Indigenous philosophies and supported by past and current research on school climate, and the authors argue that implementing this model can create a learning environment in which students feel nurtured, cared for and respected. In fact, using the Circle of Courage has the potential to provide experiences for developing healthy relationships that make the entire school community thrive. The Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 2002) is not a strategy or a theory, but more a way of thinking (Brendtro et al., 2002, as cited in Ashworth, n.d., p. 25). This model and philosophy were developed by the authors in 2002, but has since been integrated into multiple settings in North America and in British Columbia, including alternate school settings with at-risk student populations. One such school, The Whole School, in Slocan Valley, BC uses the Circle of Courage model and its medicine wheel to guide their teachings. In their website (2016), they describe how the Circle of Courage, divided into four quadrants, one for each value (belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity), is embedded into their every day school practices and policies, including (i.e., assessment, celebration, inquiry and play-based learning).
These values do not work in isolation, but rather intertwine, working together to develop self-worth and resilience. If environments fail to meet any, or part of, these four values, it is damaging to wellbeing. “When the circle of courage is broken, the lives of children are no longer in harmony and balance” (Brendtro et al., 2002, pp. 60-61). For example, children who lack self-esteem live in constant stress because their lives are unbalanced (Brendtro et al., 2002). As a result, they will often attempt to attain self-worth in any way possible, including negative behaviour (Brendtro et al., 2002). When this Circle of Courage is broken, and resilience and self-worth are not developed, school climate is jeopardized, affecting the behaviours of students.

The Circle of Courage is consistent with Coopersmith’s research (1967, as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 44), which studied how youth form ideas about their worth. Coopersmith’s (1967) work on self-concept identified four main components of self-esteem:
Significance (am I important to somebody?); competence (am I good at something?); power (can I influence my world?); and virtue (am I a good person?) (as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 44). These translate to the four values of the Circle of Courage: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (Brendtro et al., 2002). In any case, Brendtro et al. believed the courage that results from meeting these needs “is not only a cultural belonging of Native peoples, but a cultural birthright for all the world’s children” (2002, p. 45).

Indigenous people regarded children as gifts who represented the future of their families, communities, and nations (Gray Smith, 2012, p. 47). Gray Smith believed that children and future generations must always be in our minds with making decisions (2012, p. 47). Being young, smart, kind and able to speak and see things simply means they have “a tremendous amount to contribute” to our society (Wilson, n. d., as cited in Gray Smith, 2012, p. 104).

Educators can demonstrate value and respect for children by providing a school environment that strives to meet all of their psychological needs, using the Circle of Courage model. In these next sections, I go into each of the quadrants more fully.

**The Spirit of Belonging**

Brendtro et al. (2002) stated that belonging, the ability to have a greater closeness and trust of others, is the most crucial of the four values from within the Circle of Courage. Without the awareness of having a place where they are wanted, encouraged, and challenged, students will be incapable of mastery, independence, and generosity (Brendtro et al., 2000, as cited in Ashworth, n. d.). Since the sense of belonging is based entirely on relationships, it is the first of the four values to be reviewed in this paper and receives the most attention.

This fundamental human motive, which needs to be fulfilled for healthy wellbeing and adaptive functioning (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), relates to Maslow’s (1943) second level of
Hierarchy of Needs, safety, which children naturally seek to obtain through the love and acceptance of others. We are highly influenced by our interactions with others. “Emotions are the gatekeepers for learning” (OECD, 2010, p. 4), which means that positive emotions encourage motivation to learn, while negative emotions can disrupt the learning process in the brain (OECD, 2010). Human beings are naturally social creatures who are intended to live, work and play together in groups. Therefore, children who are deprived of these experiences are less likely to be fulfilled.

According to Brendtro et al. (2002), children in Indigenous communities typically had a large network of caring adults who shared the responsibility of raising them and it was this sense of belonging to the community that motivated them to show respect and concern for others and to live with minimal friction. “The presence of a strong sense of belonging makes young people more receptive to guidance, and to listen and reflect on advice from concerned adults” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 47). “Treating others as kin forges powerful social bonds that draw all into relationships of trust” (Ashworth, n. d., p. 26). This trust and sense of belonging that was provided by the entire Indigenous community is what made a child feel loved and respected. If a child was not responsive to their community, it was a sign they felt they did not belong (Brendtro et al., 2002). According to Brendtro et al. (2002), positive relationships between adults and youth are the foundation of successful programs in education. In a world where many nuclear families are living in isolation, unsupported by extended family, there is a concern that an increasing number of children are at risk for relationship impairments (Brendtro et al., 2002). Educators have the potential to support and nurture those students whose sense of belonging and acceptance is at risk.
In *The Culture Code: The secrets of highly successful groups* (2018), Coyle discussed the power of belonging and how it motivates adults in the workforce. His research shows that it is the sense of safety from shared values and emotional bonds that determines the success of working groups (Coyle, 2018, p. 21). When a belonging clue (we are close, we are safe, we share a future) is received, our social brain, or amygdala, actually lights up—it starts working hard to ensure we stay tightly connected with our people (Coyle, 2018, p. 25).

Because emotional and cognitive development are so strongly correlated, teachers must recognize the importance of building relationships that include support systems, caring about students, being positive role models and insisting on positive behaviours at school. Wellbeing and sense of belonging are important for all students, especially, but not exclusively, for those at-risk students who may be searching for belonging elsewhere. According to “Every Student Can Thrive” (n. d.), when families and communities neglect to fulfill this need, many children look for this sense of belonging from outside groups that are not positive influences. This connection with negative influences may develop in an attempt to feel important and be accepted within a social structure (“The Circle of Courage: A Model for Reaching & Teaching,” n. d.). If schools provide the positive relationships that students are looking for, there is no need for them to search elsewhere.

Increased understanding of the link between school climate and mental health and wellbeing puts increased demands on schools and educators to focus on addressing the social-emotional needs of students (Thapa, et al., 2013). A sense of belonging leads to more positive emotions and attitudes toward school and life in general (Khawaja, Ibrahim, & Schweitzer, 2017). A sense of belonging also leads to better self-esteem and mental health, less disruptive behaviour, depression and substance abuse, and increased attendance, engagement and
graduation rates (Healthy Schools BC, 2015, *School Connectedness in Action*). Students are less likely to experience violence and peer victimization and schools can provide a sense of safety (Moore, Benbenishty, Astor, & Rice, 2018). School connectedness, or belonging, is known to be one of the strongest protective factors for youth high-risk behaviours, such as substance abuse, violence, and suicide (Chung-Do, Goebert, Hamagani, Chang, & Hishinuma, 2017).

**Relationships**

The sense of school belonging, sometimes known as school connectedness, is the feeling of being accepted and valued by members of a social group within in the school. In other words, it is the social relationships that determine whether or not a student feels a school sense of belonging. “School connectedness is stronger when there are trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among everyone in the school community, including administrators, teachers, staff, students, families and the surrounding community” (Healthy Schools BC, 2015). Each type of relationship brings something unique to the development of a child (Wentzel, 1998) and being valued by others and having a sense of belonging contribute most to the wellbeing of students (Riekie, Aldridge, & Afari, 2017). On the contrary, it states in “Every Student Can Thrive” (n. d.) that destructive relationships destroy sense of belonging causing students to lose trust in adults and vulnerability with peers.

In traditional Indigenous society, positive and nurturing relationships are key to developing resiliency in youth; relationships with oneself, family and community, as well as all aspects of the child’s world, which includes their environments, the land, and their emotions (Gray Smith, 2012).

**Resilience.** An essential quality that enables individuals to thrive. This resilience is greater when children feel valued by family and are part of something much larger themselves
(Gray Smith, 2012). When school climates support the emotional and physical wellbeing of students who are faced by challenges, they are more resilient (Yablon, 2015). For example, students are less likely to be affected by bullying (Hensel et al., 2019) and less likely to engage in destructive behaviours such as substance abuse (Bond, Butler, Thomas, Carlin, Glover, Bowes & Patton, 2007). This association is an important one for educators and confirms the need for schools to place more emphasis on developing the personal strengths and environmental factors that help youth withstand high levels of risk, and possibly even flourish in adverse situations (Battistich, Schaps, & Wilson, 2004).

Teacher-student relationships. A nurturing and caring relationship with a classroom teacher is fundamental for student wellbeing, especially during the elementary and middle school years (Wentzel, 2002). By establishing a positive rapport with teachers, students will be in a better position to succeed both in and outside the classroom (Noble, 2012). Child psychologist and author, Neufeld (2004) believes children learn best when they like their teacher and when they feel it in return. Graham, Powell, & Truscott’s study (2016) found that students felt their relationships with teachers were critical to student wellbeing. For example, being listened to, comforted, and supported in their growth and challenges made a difference to their lives (Graham et al., 2016). For younger children, positive relationships with teachers caused them to feel more secure and confident, and therefore, more active in their learning environments (Cadima, Doumen, Verschueren, & Buyse, 2015).

Teacher-student relationships have direct effects on student behaviour (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). A warm and supportive teacher-student relationship will lower levels of antisocial and aggressive behaviours (Lei, Cui, & Chiu, 2016). Adolescents are less likely to engage in bullying perpetration when they have secure bonds and positive relationships with
their teachers who are important adults in their lives (Wang, Swearer, Lembeck, Collins, & Berry, 2015). Positive teacher-student relationships were directly related to higher prosocial behaviours in students. Modelling empathy and settling conflicts in a fair manner, teachers are able to positively influence bullying behaviour (Yan, Evans, & Harvey, 2009), while negative teacher-student relationships were associated with bullying, especially when students were also rejected by their peers (McGrath & Van Bergen, 2015). That teacher-student relationships have a direct effect on student behaviours, especially with regards to bullying, indicates the need for teachers to be aware of the powerful influence they have on their students, especially in the lower grades (Wang et al., 2015).

The teacher-student relationship can directly affect student anxiety (Kurdi and Archambault, 2018) and poor relationships with teachers is associated with lack of student engagement causing an increased likelihood of substance abuse, poor mental health and lower secondary school graduation rates (Bond et al., 2007). It is important for teachers to recognize that anxiety disorders are among the most commonly diagnosed mental health problems in children and that their relationships could make a positive difference in the lives of students (White et al., 2010).

A teacher’s expectations of students are one of the most powerful determinants of success for those students. A teacher who believes the students are capable of excellence and can achieve will work wonders. This means a change in outlook and beliefs about education, on the part of the educator, is needed. Educators need to address, discuss and overcome the tendency to limit their beliefs and attitudes toward their students (BC Ministry of Education, 2015).

**Peer relationships.** As young people get older they are increasingly seeking to form social connections outside the home and belonging to a peer group becomes an important source
of support and approval that is often linked to mental health, wellbeing and life satisfaction (Oberle, Guhn, Gadermann, Thomson, & Schonert-Reichl, 2018). Oberle et al. found that students who have negative experiences with their peers have lower levels of wellbeing and more mental health problems (2018). Girls, in particular, reported more depression and conduct problems when there was friction with peers. Therefore, as students begin to seek independence from their parents and look to their peers for advice and acceptance, it is important that educators implement programs and activities that foster positive student interactions and reject any negative behaviours.

Higher levels of optimism are said to be found in adolescents who belong to their peer group and who experience less victimization by peers in school (Oberle et al., 2018). Positivity, or optimism, correlates with positive perceptions of classroom experiences, overall engagement with school life and more prosocial behaviours (Luengo et al., 2017). It is a vital part of health and wellbeing that has been linked to resilience to stressful life events and persevering even in the face of great adversity (Rasmussen, Wrosch, Scheier, & Carver, 2006). The sense of belonging that comes from school connectedness, particularly connecting with peers, has a significant impact on student resilience because students feel valued and feel they belong to the school when their peer relationships are positive (Riekie et al., 2016). In addition, students who are resilient will support their peers in situations that require high moral standards (Noble, 2012). Moral identity is impacted by diversity in that schools that foster acceptance and inclusiveness influence how students behave toward their peers (Riekie et al., 2016). By providing a place where students feel they belong because of their positive relationships with peers, teachers are also providing a place in which positive growth and resilient outcomes can occur.
Lower levels of violence are associated with positive peer interactions within the classroom (Sprott, 2004). Students who have positive relationships with their classmates are more likely to enjoy safer school environments and less likely to be targets of bullying (Rodkin & Hodges, 2013). Also, when high-risk students have few positive relationships in their lives, they will avoid jeopardizing peer relationships by interacting in positive ways (Sprott, 2004). At the same time, peer rejection is associated with disengagement from school, poor academics, disruptiveness and dropping out of school (Raskauskas, Gregory, Harvey, Rifshana, & Evans, 2010). Even if students are not personally attacked, but there is a general sense of unsafety in the school, feelings toward school have been known to be damaged (Raskauskas et al, 2010). The knowledge of these benefits should motivate teachers to nurture peer relationships within schools.

**Staff relationships.** Research supports that positive working relationships between teacher colleagues and administrators, established through trust, support, and open communication help create a collective sense of school pride and belonging among students. First, teachers who openly communicate with their colleagues tend to be more open to professional growth and innovation (Collie, Perry, & Shapka, 2011). This means that when relationships between school staff and administration are strong, the implementation of school-wide programs are more likely to be successful and students will benefit and be much happier. Collaborative teaching makes the working environment for teachers more positive and impacts student achievement (Morris, 2007). It is also associated with higher levels of students’ sense of school belonging, school satisfaction and self-efficacy for new experience (Rivera, McMahon, & Keys, 2014). In addition, staff who feel supported by their colleagues and administrators perceive their school climate more positively and will model positive interpersonal behaviours.
for students. Principals’ and vice-principals’ leadership and management abilities play a significant role in developing and nurturing strong relationships and fostering collaboration among staff (Day, 2000). They influence the general atmosphere of the school but, in addition, often their social interactions with students directly influence students’ behaviours and feelings towards school (Cemalcilar, 2010).

Acquiring knowledge and skills are important goals but, first and foremost, schools must help students believe in themselves and others, and love learning (Littky & Grabelle, 2004). Emotional mastery is developed through interactions and experiences that provide protection, trust, acceptance, appreciation, care and love. Teachers have the potential to help students experience this by developing positive relationships with them and providing opportunities for students to interact positively with their peers, other teachers and staff, administration, families and community. If positive relationships can be nurtured, it is highly probable that student behaviours will improve.

The Spirit of Mastery

Along with the need to belong, children seek to find competence in school. They want to see themselves as competent and successful human beings. The Spirit of Mastery addresses the human desire to succeed, solve problems and strive for personal best. It is based on the idea that when a child’s need to be competent is satisfied, motivation for further achievement is enhanced (White, 1959, as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002). On the contrary, if children are deprived of opportunities for success, they will express their frustration by acting out or feeling helpless and inferior (Brendtro et al., 2002). According to Brendtro et al. (2002), Indigenous children were taught to carefully observe and listen to those with more experience. A person with greater ability was seen as a model for learning, not as a rival. Each person strived for mastery for
personal growth, but not to be superior to someone else (Brendtro et al., 2002). Competence was developed through play; dolls and puppets taught nurturing behaviours, while bows and arrows prepared for hunting. Children were highly motivated because of the social and active nature of this type of learning. Competency was also achieved through work, as children were given important responsibilities and tasks starting at a very young age (Brendtro et al., 2002).

Traditionally, Indigenous children were encouraged in their competency to achieve personal goals and inner satisfaction, rather than to compete with others to be superior (Brendtro et al., 2002). Children were taught to acknowledge the success of others and to be humble with their own successes. Other people’s successes were celebrated as if they were their own and success was widespread, rather than only for a few privileged (Brendtro et al., 2002).

Traditional education has fostered competitiveness in schools. Assigning percentages, letter grades, and pass/fail feedback have been the trends for many years. Fortunately, British Columbia’s new curriculum has responded to research that supports personal goal setting and intrinsic motivation to succeed. Providing feedback that guides students in their individual learning journeys (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015), inquiry-based learning (Egan, 2015) that addresses diverse interests and learning styles, and learning opportunities that are purposeful, all contribute to more positive and motivating experiences for students.

High teacher expectations for students to perform to their full potential have a significant influence on social and academic motivation in students (Wentzel, 2002). Experiencing the intrinsic rewards of hard work is essential for successful human development and appropriate levels of challenge established by the teacher can be highly motivating for students (Rathunde & Csikszentmihalyi, 2005). At the same time, negative and highly critical feedback on students’
classroom function can have a debilitating effect on student achievement (Roorda, Helma, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011).

Too often students are unable to make connections to their learning and are unclear about learning intentions. As a result, there may be lack of engagement and/or motivation. Therefore, if schools are not providing multi-faceted opportunities that stem from students’ interests and learning goals, they will not develop the skills and ways of learning that will promote success and a desire to learn more (Littky & Grabelle 2004). There is also the need for just the right amount of challenge to engage and develop confidence in students but not cause anxiety and fear. “Challenges give children vision and direction, focus and perseverance. Support gives the serenity that allows them freedom from worry and fear” (Csikszentmihalyi, n.d., as cited in Ashworth, n.d., p. 30).

The Spirit of Independence

Today’s youth are experiencing a sense of helplessness and lack of autonomy in schools. According to Brendtro et al., (2002) these youth may become alienated and fail school for if they feel a lack of control, they will not be motivated to succeed. These effects may also occur when children are given too much independence at a young age (Elkind, 1981). Adults believed children must be given opportunities to be dependent, to learn to respect and value elders and be taught through explanation for desired behaviour (Light & Martin, 1985 as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002). Yet, at the same time, individual freedom was very important and survival outside the community depended on an individual’s motivation to set personal goals and a willingness to accept success or failure in achieving them.

This balance between dependence and autonomy on that path to adulthood is necessary; children need to feel secure and supported while they are learning to separate and make decisions
independently (Glasser, 1973). A balance between success and failure must also exist. Students should learn to succeed through experiencing success, yet if they do not succeed, they must be encouraged to persevere, to find out what is contributing to their failure and try another approach (Glasser, 1973). Recognition of mistakes and accepting responsibility for them are important aspects of the learning process (Dweck, 2007). Although it is important for children to experience success, experiencing mistakes is equally important. Both neuroscience and Indigenous philosophy agree that mistakes and failures are essential for growth and development. It is the challenges that create resilience and self-worth. With success in surmounting challenges, the desire to achieve is strengthened (Dweck, 2007). Indigenous child-rearing philosophy supports the concept of guidance without interference (Brendtro et al., 2002). Once the child has been taught, they should be free to make their own decisions and possibly make mistakes.

Glasser (1973) believed that schools should not reward children for their successes and punish them for failures with letter grades. It sends the wrong message that good grades make them better people and poor grades mean they are bad people. This message will cause them to lose confidence in themselves and quit, instead of persevering. Assessment for Learning is similar in that feedback and assessment are provided throughout the journey and experiencing successes and failures along the way ensures that, in the end, everyone has the potential to achieve their goals and be successful (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015). Elders did not give prizes or rewards for positive behaviour as they believed it would make children weak rather than foster a sense of responsibility in them. The reward, in itself, was the achievement. Assessment for Learning also supports the idea that students take ownership and responsibility for their learning when they are intrinsically motivated (Wiliam & Leahy, 2015).
Early European views based on obedience have been the standard practice in parenting and education. However, in traditional Indigenous cultures, children were not told they had to do something. Adults modelled, nurtured, taught values, and provided feedback, rather than coercing the children (Brendtro et al., 2002). There was simply an expectation that they would do it when they were ready. The view was that the desire to do the right thing should be intrinsic and that when children make mistakes, they should not be punished, but only made to understand the consequences of their actions and how it affects others. By training children to be obedient, we also teach them to be machines in the hands of others, rather than developing the ability to make moral decisions on their own (Brendtro, et al., 2002).

Students’ voices need to be heard, and a trusting adult must attempt to understand the reasons for the undesirable behaviour. It is the adults’ responsibility to discuss the problem with the child and ensure they acknowledge and are accountable for their mistakes. Adults must show they trust and respect the child to accept the natural consequences of their choices and decisions (Brendtro et al., 2002). On the other hand, with excessive permissiveness, the child who gets everything they want may lead to lack of self-esteem, delinquency and aggression. In other cases, attempts to satisfy the selfish child may lead to a sense of entitlement and lack of self-discipline. There is a need to develop new educational approaches that “avoid the pitfalls of either overindulgence or authoritarian obedience” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 28).

Relationships are the foundation of independence for students. Nurturing students with guidance, trust, respectful discipline, and freedom will give them the tools to grow toward independence. Educators are in a position to foster this by allowing their students to direct their own learning and by providing experiences that empower them.
The Spirit of Generosity

Indigenous elders believe generosity is the most important of the virtues (Brendtro et al., 2002) and is what cultivates character in a person. Traditional Indigenous ways meant teaching children the importance of giving and sharing with others, providing purpose in their lives. Giving handmade gifts to others less fortunate than themselves and to loved ones as part of ceremonies were important ways of life for the Indigenous people. Although goods and property were important, they were not acquired for their own sake. Things were less important than people and a person’s willingness to give up their own possessions was a test of their own values. It was not considered true generosity unless something was sacrificed.

Our ability to contribute and be a caring citizen requires a strong identity and sense of belonging (Gray Smith, 2012). It is only when one knows who they are and where they come from that they are then able to contribute to the wellbeing of others. This supports the Circle of Courage’s first principle, Sense of Belonging, which emphasizes the need to feel loved, cared for and respected. By providing this for students, schools can help students recognize their power to make a difference and influence the world in positive ways (Bendtro et al., 2002). When students engage in authentic experiences and see the results of community service and caring for others, they are inspired and motivated to continue doing so in the future. That Indigenous cultures have endured the challenges of this past century demonstrates the power of their values and resilience (Gray Smith, 2012).

Generosity is not possible without a sense of belonging and reciprocity. Generosity, a virtue that is an act of good will, is, in itself, a positive behaviour that can be encouraged in schools by providing experiences for students to be both recipients and givers.
Indicators of Schools with Positive Relationships and Implications for Education

Providing experiences to gain sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity has the potential to create a positive school climate that includes students, teachers, parents and members of the surrounding school community (Van Bockern & McDonald, 2012). However, what does a school look like when all four values are met? How might we know whether or not we are successfully implementing these ideas? The quality of human relationships in schools has a greater impact on student behaviour and achievement than the specific teaching techniques and strategies used. Before students are able to fully develop mastery, independence and generosity, educators must first develop positive rapports and form strong, caring relationships with their students (Brendtro et al., 2002). Although characteristics of a positive school climate, such as an inviting, comfortable physical environment, (desirable, but rare), shared goals and values and overall organization are important; it is the relationships, trust, care, and respect that are most valued.

While it is difficult to measure school climate, upon entering a school that uses the Circle of Courage one can feel the positivity. Robron Alternative School in Campbell River, BC is an example of a Circle of Courage school. My first contacts were with the administrative assistants and teachers in the front office. They were friendly and helpful. As I ventured down the hallways to find my destination, I was immediately impressed by how connected the school is with the community. The building houses a wide variety of agencies and community services including Child and Youth Mental Health, Joh Howard Society, Immigrant Welcome Centre, the Community Literacy Association, and the local Metis Association, to mention only a few. Student work lined the hallways and Circle of Courage student art was displayed (i.e., mosaic,
When I entered the classroom, students appeared engaged. Some were working in small groups while others worked independently or with teachers. The classroom teachers and educational assistants were open and willing to share information with me. The assembly was well attended by students, led by students, and about the students. Recognition certificates were presented by classroom teachers to their students, and the recipients’ body language indicated pride and joy. Audience members were respectful and appeared to enjoy watching their peers receive their awards. The awards focused on Circle of Courage values and recognized students for specific personal and/or academic accomplishments. I heard laughter, respectful clapping and words of encouragement. Staff members showed a humourous video they produced to advertise their upcoming school-wide chef competition. The students and staff clearly appreciated the video and I found myself laughing aloud. Competing team members were introduced and presented with special aprons.

The gymnasium podium was designed by an Indigenous member of the community who is also a parent. He opened and closed the assembly with drumming, singing and a personal story about overcoming challenges. I could not help but notice the pride in his son’s face as he watched and listened. My visit concluded with a monthly student/staff luncheon that was made and served by students. Students sat and chatted with the staff. Two young women sat at my table; one ate quietly while the other shared her excitement of getting her driver’s licence that morning. It was evident that the staff members at my table were aware of what was going on in their students’ lives and their interest appeared authentic. Three of the staff members I spoke with mentioned how they love their jobs.
According to Brendtro et al. (2002), when children feel they belong somewhere they are more likely to pour energy into mastering something specific and they will be confident in who they are. With this confidence comes a desire to seek healthy independence and develop a sense of responsibility. Finally, when there is a sense of belonging, one is more likely to be generous with their time, money, and belongings and more willing to make others feel they belong (2002).

The success of Circle of Courage principles relies on quality relationships, and it is these relationships that impact student behaviour. In the following sections of this chapter, I will describe the indicators of a positive school climate with healthy relationships brought about by implementing the Circle of Courage philosophy. Examples of practices that encourage positive relationships are also described.

**Sense of belonging.** A Circle of Courage school is a place where students have a sense of belonging because their universal longing for human attachment is nurtured by relationships of trust and respect (Brendtro et al., 2002). Such a school is warm, friendly and inviting and the students feel safe, secure and connected to healthy, loving adults and other youth. When this need is met, a child will truly feel they are loved, cared for and respected (Brokenleg & Brockern, 2003).

If students have destructive relationships where they are mistreated, abandoned, rejected, or wounded by parents, they often have social and emotional difficulties marked by mental illness, delinquency, depression and defeat (Menninger, 1963, as cited in Brendtro, 2002, p. 9). Because so many children are being raised by only one parent or two parents who both work outside the home, with no extended family to help support them, there is an increasing number of children at risk for relationship impairment (Brendtro, et al., 2002). Therefore, it is the entire community, especially the school, which must take responsibility for fostering a sense of
belonging. We can no longer rely on the nuclear family to do this job. “Educators must play a leading role in responding to the needs of children adrift” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 12).

At one time, all members of Indigenous groups had a part in raising the children. This ensured that all the child’s needs would be met, especially when maternal parents were not fulfilling their responsibilities as parents. Schools should become the new tribe that supports and nurtures youth, but instead they have been contributing to the problem of alienation (Brendtro, 2002). As a result, many youths who do not establish meaningful relationships at home and at school, seek bonds and connections with groups and individuals with similar negative experiences. This increases the potential of developing behaviours and relationships that put them at risk. So, in order to develop a positive school climate where students feel connected and a sense of belonging, schools need to promote social networks and nurture relationships. It is important that all members of the school community be included in forming these connections and that relationships are placed ahead of content, context and processes in the school curriculum.

Research supports the need to improve teacher-student relationships and classroom climate to establish sense of belonging. These connections can be between the students and their classroom teacher, as well as other teachers in the school. In the classroom, sharing circles and daily greetings have the potential to build, nurture and recognise the dignity and presence of a student. Greeting my students at my classroom door each morning allows me to greet my students and have a moment of personal contact where we can briefly discuss events from the previous day, or I can comment on new haircuts, etc. Making this small effort shows students they are important and valued. My students look forward to our daily sharing circle. We use them for a variety of reasons: to share emotions, events, and interests, to solve problems, and to
discuss issues outside of the classroom. In addition to nurturing relationships, sharing circles help students to identify their emotions and practice respectful listening. Raskauskas et al.’s (2010) study suggests that modelling and teaching prosocial behaviours, like empathy, will further establish student connections that could reduce victimisation in schools.

A way for schools to nurture peer relationships is to provide opportunities for students to interact positively within the classroom and beyond. Offering before and after school free-play sessions in the gym, lunch-time intra-mural programs, board games and chess clubs, drawing classes and music/drama opportunities enhances peer connections and interactions, but also closes social divides making students feel valued. This may include participation in extracurricular activities such as team sports, cross-country running, dance, and drama. Peer mentoring, tutoring, buddy classes, and multi-age events further connections among students and leadership groups provide opportunities for students to make decisions, plan and organize events, and be positive role models to their peers. Activities that involve teamwork create challenges and promote co-operative learning that require collaboration skills. Providing opportunities and programmes for staff and students to interact outside of formal lesson time can also promote connectedness. For example, my students are thrilled when I attend an out-of-school event (i.e., baseball game, dance/music recital, etc.). To have their teacher drive them to an evening school function or attend a weekend fun fair or family movie night is very meaningful for students. Any activity or program designed with the aim to cultivate positive relationships is going to benefit students.

Schools should have a shared vision founded on common values, attitudes, and beliefs, but this can be challenging to form without compromising the personal values and beliefs of individual staff members. However, the Circle of Courage can provide a universally shared
vision that supports a genuine learning community, in which diversity is celebrated and effective teaching and learning strategies are practised, creating a context in which all students, teachers and families participate and contribute as valued members (Espiner & Guild, 2010). My experience is that if the entire school community, including students and parents, create a vision about caring, respect and trust, it will be more meaningful and more likely to be adhered to.

Because the home is a highly influential learning environment, building connections between the home and school is vital to learner success (OECD, 2010). This includes proactively involving families in their children’s schooling and extending personalised invitations to them to become involved. A meet-the-teacher night in September, occasional open houses throughout the school year, regular three-way conferencing, student-led conferences, and invitations to the classroom to help out with reading and art programs provide simple ways for keeping lines of communication open and demonstrating to importance of learning to students. Inviting parents and other community members to share a skill (i.e., yoga, pottery) or an interest (i.e., share a favourite book on World Book Day, join the class on a beach clean-up, help thread needles for sewing button blankets) not only provides knowledge and expertise but further establishes those important connections. Extending this to the larger community by inviting elders and other members of the community is also valuable and by venturing into the community, it expands students’ sense of belonging to feel connected to their land and neighbourhood.

**Sense of mastery.** The school that meets the mastery needs of all students is one where the students are able to succeed because multiple ways of knowing and learning are offered, there are opportunities to reach full academic potential and experience success, and emotional and social skills that are developmentally appropriate are taught. Learning must have a purpose,
be meaningful, and reflect the interests of the students. These innovative ways of learning encourage positive relationships with teachers, peers, parents, knowledge-keepers, elders, and community to flourish.

Learning is more meaningful when lessons and morals are taught through storytelling and when it is taught holistically, rather than in isolated subjects. Acknowledging all types of learning, equality, and being a detective to figure out what gifts children have is essential in meeting the needs of students (Gray Smith, 2012). Students should have choices in how they represent their understanding allowing for differences and individuality. Bringing the community into the classroom and entering into respectful relationships with the knowledge-keepers is value for learners (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017). Students working together and being responsible for the learning of others as well as their own is a valuable part of learning (OECD, 2010). Emphasizing thinking and increasing higher-order learning has educational benefits, including an alternative to ability grouping.

Teachers must understand how school, teacher, and student factors affect learning and aim to create challenging social environments for teaching meaningful content. Students need opportunities to develop higher-order cognitive skills through meaningful inquiry-based approaches that require sustained engagement, collaboration, research, management of resources, and development of a performance or product. Heritage and science fair projects are an effective way to motivate students and develop a wide range of skills. Using inquiry to teach math concepts improves attitudes toward math and encourages diverse thinking and problem-solving strategies. Opportunities for differentiated learning, choice of topics based on interest, and choice of methods to demonstrate understanding are all important. Showcasing work, celebrating achievements, and allowing students to plan and organize events creates purpose and promotes a
sense of pride and responsibility. Project-based learning, problem-based learning, and learning through design (OECD, 2010) are approaches to learning that align with Circle of Courage values (2002). Teachers must allow themselves to be vulnerable in front of their students and be willing to learn alongside them. Modelling a passion for learning and admitting they are not experts are valuable lessons for students.

**Sense of independence.** Purpose is as important to the sense of independence as it is to the sense of mastery. Without meaningful roles and autonomy, one feels powerless and develops learned helplessness (Brentro et al., 2002). In positive school climates, students feel empowered and intrinsically motivated because they have ownership over their learning. However, for this to occur, educators must treat children as partners in learning and give them freedom and responsibility (developmentally appropriate) to explore and make choices and decisions (Van Bockern & McDonald, 2012). Indigenous and Western values about autonomy are similar. However, unlike Western views, traditional Indigenous cultures recognize that children must first have opportunities to be independent, while Western views either put too much emphasis on autonomy or too much emphasis on dependence, creating an imbalance that can cause disorders relating to helplessness and lack of control (Brendtro et al., 2002). In schools, beginning in the earliest grades, shared power can come in the form of voting, classroom meetings, designated class experts, choice in assignments, designated classroom duties (dusting the book shelves, leading others to gym class), and contributing to peer mediation. Assessment for learning (Egan, 2015) is a way for students to set goals and monitor their own learning. My experience is that when students are taught to reflect on and make decisions about their own learning, they not only take ownership, but also feel valued and trusted by adults. When my students participate in the digital reporting process, they have a more thorough understanding of where they stand and
develop skills to communicate their learning. Three-way conferencing with parents provides the opportunity for student voice. Other examples of ways to foster independence include organizing school assemblies, sports days, and theme days and working as office and lunch time monitors, crossing guards, and technology crews. Schools are optimal environments to develop a sense of independence yet be guided by adults without interference.

Schools should have effective avenues for students’ voices to be heard, respected, and valued in every aspect of the school environment (such as curriculum design, classroom pedagogy, formal student leadership structures, and annual feedback surveys). Not only does this mean the school has a clear value system in which all relationships will become consistent with these shared values but also, this shared foundation of values is necessary to ensure children grow up to have a clear sense of purpose. A cohesive community of shared values, beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies is the most important factor in creating a total school (Brendtro et al., 2002).

Probably one of the most challenging aspects of teaching is dealing with challenging student behaviour, which probably explains why restorative justice such a controversial topic in schools is today. While Indigenous children were given “opportunities to respect and value elders, and be taught through explanation for desired behaviour,” (Light & Martin, 1985, as cited in Brendtro et. al., p. 52), Western approaches to discipline tend to focus on a demand for obedience, following rules, and punishment for poor decisions and behaviours. I support Brendtro et al.’s (2002) theory that negative environments and expectations can produce failure and futility in young people and impact school climate. Brendtro et al. (2002) believed teachers would be more successful if they viewed poor behaviour as a reflection of the youth’s personal needs or distress and focus on the child’s strengths and potential. In my experience, negative
thoughts and actions from the teacher just add “fuel to the fire.” Reacting with empathy and concern will be more beneficial to the child and, although it can be extremely challenging, it is important educators remember to always accept the child, even when rejecting their negative behaviour (Brendtro et al., 2002). When children have a sense of independence they are intrinsically motivated to “do the right thing.” By teaching them how their actions affect others and providing logical consequences, they are more likely to understand and learn from their mistakes.

Clear rules and support for reporting problems and seeking help increases a student’s sense of resilience and moral identity. This suggests that educators should consider what constitutes firm guidance and ensure that structures are in place to provide students with avenues to get help. Promoting healthier forms of discipline by regulating behaviour through teaching and not punishment is also important. Structures and processes must be enforced in a fair, firm and equitable manner, provide the capacity to restore healthy relational functioning and enable the maintenance and repair of respectful relationships within a school community.

**Sense of generosity.** A Circle of Courage school provides opportunities for students to serve in satisfying ways, promotes hope and optimism through rituals and ceremony, and is a place of caring, compassion, empathy, and kindness. A Circle of Courage school promotes holistic learning by focusing on the wellness of the mind, the body and the spirit. A Circle of Courage school will nurture students’ concern for others, so they feel purpose in life (Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2003). Ingle and Selye (1975), pioneers of stress research, claimed that altruism is the ultimate resource for coping with life’s conflicts, for in reaching out to help another, one breaks free from preoccupation with the self. It increases self-worth as students commit to the positive value of caring for others (Brendtro et al., 2002). Brendtro et al. stated that at one time
the Indigenous goal of life was to ensure the survival of oneself and the tribe. Today, most people have the means to survive but lack a meaning to their existence. It is believed that young people will not be able to develop a sense of value for themselves unless they first have opportunities to be of value to others. “In contemporary society, this spirit of mutual caring is often lost in the selfish pursuit of individual goals” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 34). Brendtro et al. (2002) felt that, in the past, schools were partly responsible for this selfishness by encouraging academic and physical competition. They believed educators must develop educational programs that promote co-operation and caring communities to foster a sense of purpose in students.

Employment does not necessarily instill a sense of responsibility in youth (Brendtro et al., 2002). In the past, there was purpose in helping to support families or save for college, it had a purpose. However, today’s youth typically do not contribute to the family and only work to acquire material possessions for themselves. In fact, Bendtro et al., believed adolescent employment might do more harm than good, as it often interferes with education and brings consumptive power rather than social responsibility. “The greater the net worth of a youth (value of possessions acquired with his own money), the more the youth is at risk for destructive activities” (Brendtro et al., 2002, p. 37).

In the past when multi-generational families lived and worked side by side, children had an important role in helping the family survive. There were many opportunities for cooperation and giving. Today, many youths are provided with all of their material needs but there is little opportunity for them to contribute to the needs of others. Brendtro et al. (2002) believed the lack of development of responsibility in today’s youth is causing young people to believe their lives make little difference to the world.
A lack of attention from adults who don’t have time for children could partly be to blame for a lack of generosity (Charleston, as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002). Western culture has allowed the concept of time to dictate our lives, when in fact, it should be our relationships with family, friends and community that we should be adjusting our lives for (Charleston, as cited in Brendtro et al., 2002). If we continue to place so much emphasis on time and its convenience we will have “empty adults, lonely elders and neglected children” (Brendtro et al, 2002, p. 40) who feel they have little to offer the world.

Engaging students in community service would provide them with contextualized learning experiences based on authentic, real-world situations in their communities (OECD, 2010). I believe it is important to address generosity at three levels: school, local community, and global. In the classroom, there are many opportunities for teachers to model generosity and encourage students to give to others. The students in my class frequently hand out tickets to one another in recognition of positive behaviours or acts of kindness. Throughout the school year, my students bring food for a class luncheon or tea, and they enjoy sharing with their classmates. In the past it has been rewarding for my students to gather food donations for the food bank and knit scarves for the homeless. What made this experience most valuable was the opportunity to meet the recipients in person. On a global level, my class has sponsored students and raised funds to support their education. This has been meaningful because they communicate with the students, learn about their culture and take ownership of the fundraising events (planning and coordinating). Other possibilities for giving include making gifts for family members, volunteering and interacting in retirement homes, participating in the Me to We movement and working at a soup kitchen. Western culture recognizes the responsibility we have in looking out
for the welfare of others, but there is always room for more opportunities for student community service in the curriculum.

New School Curriculum and Innovative Ways of Learning

British Columbia’s New Curriculum. To modernize the curriculum, in response to a demanding and ever-changing world, the BC Ministry of Education “consulted with education experts both locally and internationally,” (2015, p. 1). They felt “that to prepare students for the future, the curriculum must be learner-centred and flexible, and maintain a focus on literacy and numeracy, while supporting deeper learning through concept-based and competency-driven approaches” (2015, p.1).

The curriculum is based on a “Know-Do-Understand” model that consists of three main concepts: Content (what topics and knowledge students will need to KNOW at each grade level), Curricular Competencies (the skills, strategies and processes—what students will be able to DO) and Big Ideas (the generalizations, principles, and key concepts that students will UNDERSTAND over time) (2015, p. 1). It is based on the understanding that “deeper learning is better achieved through ‘doing’ than through passive listening or reading” and “engages students in authentic tasks that connect learning to the real world,” (BC Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4). Another noteworthy change to the curriculum includes the flexibility in learning environments. Teachers are able to “use time and space in creative ways—ways that adapt to the students’ needs and interests adapting to students’ needs and interests,” (2015, p. 6). The curriculum takes an inquiry approach to learning that includes project-based learning, problem-based learning, assessment for learning, and research and scientific methods (2015, p. 6). The curriculum encourages collaboration with community members and values diversity (2015, pp. 6-11). Lastly, and most importantly, the curriculum provides Aboriginal perspectives and
knowledge. It is the goal of the curriculum that “the voice of Aboriginal people be heard in all aspects of the education system” (2015, p. 7).

Figure 3: BC’s New Curriculum Model. Copyright (2015) Province of British Columbia. All rights reserved. Reproduced with permission of the Province of British Columbia.

Contributing to deeper learning, essential learning, literacy and numeracy foundations, and core competencies (Thinking, Communication, and Personal and Social Competency) are the foundation of the new curriculum.
Table 1: Comparison of Circle of Courage and BC’s New Curriculum Competencies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle of Courage</th>
<th>BC’s New Curriculum Competencies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Belonging</td>
<td>Positive Personal &amp; Cultural Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Mastery</td>
<td>Creative and Critical Thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Independence</td>
<td>Personal Awareness &amp; Responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spirit of Generosity</td>
<td>Social Responsibility</td>
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**OECD’s Seven Principles of Learning (2010).** The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is a global organization whose aim is to promote policies that improve the economic and social wellbeing of people around the world. They provide a forum in which governments from around the world work together to seek solutions to common problems. The rapid changes in technology and the change from an industrial to a knowledge-based society means that traditional educational approaches are no longer meeting the needs of 21st-century students. In response to this, the OECD examined extensive research on the nature of learning. As a result, the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) created seven key principles that summarize how to optimize learning for the young people of today:

1. Learners at the centre.
2. Social nature of learning.
3. Emotions are integral to learning.
4. Recognizing individual differences.
5. The learning environment devises programmes that demand hard work and challenge from all but without excessive overload.
6. The learning environment operates with clarity of expectations using assessment strategies consistent with these expectations; there is strong emphasis on formative feedback to support learning.

7. The learning environment strongly promotes building horizontal connectedness across areas of knowledge and subjects as well as to the community and the wider world. (OECD, 2010, pp. 14-17)

The OECD has concluded that innovative learning environments in which students have optimal learning are ones in which students work cooperatively and engage in community service, that connect the home and the school, and use technology, formative assessment, and inquiry-based methods (OECD, 2010).

**Table 2: Comparing the Circle of Courage to the OECD Seven Principles of Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Circle of Courage</th>
<th>OECD Seven Principles of Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Belonging</td>
<td>Emotions are Integral to Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Mastery</td>
<td>Learners at the Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Social Nature of Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emotions are Integral to Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recognizing Individual Differences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stretching all Students</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Building Horizontal Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Independence</td>
<td>Assessment for Learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spirit of Generosity</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Limitations in the Current Curriculum

On the surface, it appears the Core Competencies of the BC Curriculum align with Circle of Courage values. However, if one looks deeper, the Core Competencies are only addressing the cognitive-rational aspects of learning that relate to achievement. While Mastery and Independence are strongly aligned, it fails to take the humanistic or holistic approach to learning that is the foundation of Indigenous pedagogy. The Core Competencies appear to acknowledge relationships and say we must meet the social-emotional needs of students. However, it provides no direction on how this might be achieved.

The OECD Seven Principles of Learning align a little better with the Core Competencies of the BC Curriculum, but still focus too much on achievement. The values of the Circle of Courage are more pragmatic. Understanding the child and ensuring they have a sense of belonging and make connections are the key pieces to Circle of Courage philosophy.

The OECD Principles of Learning and BC’s New Curriculum (2018) support a concept-based, competency-driven approach to deeper learning. Although this is a move in the right direction and it aligns with much of First Peoples Principles of Learning, it focuses largely on academic success and shows a significant gap that fails to address the significance of nurturing positive relationships to ensure social-emotional wellbeing for students; and consequently, desirable student behaviour and conditions optimal for learning.
First Peoples Principles of Learning. Education in British Columbia has undergone significant changes over the last decade. There has been a greater commitment to include the First Peoples perspectives of teaching and learning that are relevant not only for Indigenous people, but for the education of all people. “Including Indigenous education in the curriculum is not just more inclusive, it’s just good pedagogy” (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017, p. 9). Restoule and Chaw-win-is explained we should explore the old ways in order to move forward so Indigenous student achievement can be improved and Canadian student awareness and understanding of Indigenous cultures is increased (2017). Child and Benwell (2015) also speak to the value of bringing a more holistic and Indigenous or “Aboriginal worldview” to education with a focus on “connectedness and relationship” (p. 16).
Education is the key to reconciliation (Gray Smith, 2012). There is the hope that the reintroduction of Indigenous pedagogies can play an important role in the reconciliation process. Canadians also deserve the opportunity to be informed about Canada’s history brought about by colonization and the impact it had on the Indigenous population (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017). The increase in the Indigenous population and their urbanization means that teachers in public schools are going to have more encounters with Indigenous students and Indigenous people will be an important force in Canada’s future (Gray Smith, 2012). It is not just an opportunity for Indigenous students to learn more about Indigenous perspectives, but for all students to receive a more comprehensive approach to subjects taught in schools.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning (FPPL) fit better with the Core Competencies of the BC Curriculum and are a more helpful way of being and teaching because they cover each of the Circle of Courage values. Although the FPPL are quite broad and elusive, by addressing each of the four values they also speak to school climate and create the social and emotional conditions necessary for all the other models to work. See Figure 5 on the following page.
Conclusion

This review demonstrates the positive correlation between relationships/school climate and student wellbeing/behaviour. Based on research evidence, it would be expected to see these topics highlighted in the BC Curriculum yet, surprisingly they receive minimal attention. In fact,
the Ministry of Education refers to Caring Schools only in the context of bullying prevention. Healthy Schools BC (2015) and the Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH BC) (2015), on the other hand, have identified School Connectedness (Sense of Belonging) as a growing area of interest that deserves greater attention.

Indigenous ways of doing and knowing are just that; a holistic way of “being and thinking.” They are not simply pieces of knowledge and content that can be inserted into the curriculum; therefore, the emphasis needs to be shifted. Rather than trying to integrate Indigenous philosophy into the curriculum, the Circle of Courage should be the curriculum into which everything else is embedded. Adding First Peoples Principles of Learning (Chrona, 2014; FNESC, n.d.) to the curriculum is a positive step, however, using the Circle of Courage would provide a framework that encourages learners to be balanced in all realms: physical, intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and empowered in terms of who they are as people. With student wellbeing there will be fewer challenging behaviours and improved school climate.

I am confident that by adopting Circle of Courage values, educators can create conditions that nurture students’ sense of belonging and positive relationships so that a positive school climate may be achieved. That the BC Curriculum neglects to recognize the impact of positive relationships and school climate on student wellbeing inspired me to develop a professional development workshop that supports teachers in using Indigenous philosophies, specifically the Circle of Courage, to improve student behaviour. The following chapter provides the steps in designing this professional development workshop using the Adaptive Schools format and includes my rationale for decisions made throughout the design process.
Chapter 3: The Design Process

This section will describe the details of this Master of Education Leadership Major Project. It will begin with an overview of research findings in a summary fashion, explain how the process and development of my topic evolved, and provide my rationale for providing a workshop using an Adaptive Schools format. The target audience and implementation plan for the workshop, Improving Student Behaviour Using the Circle of Courage, will be described, including the rationale for the types of workshop activities and experiences I have chosen. Through the design of a workshop (Chapters 3 and 4), I seek to assist teachers in building an experiential understanding of the values and processes of collaborative inquiry and Circle of Courage approaches that help prevent students from becoming isolated, while also reaching out to those who have been broken from past experiences (Brendtro, et al., 2002).

Inquiry and Reflection

The process of writing this project paper was grounded in an inquiry process using the Spirals of Inquiry model (Kaser & Halbert, 2017). After 27 years as an educator, I found myself teaching in a new school district and spent the entire first year scanning the learners to find out what was going on for them. I observed an overwhelming amount of challenging student behaviours school-wide and teachers searching for ways to cope with the demands of working with these children. Looking beyond the learners themselves, it was also apparent there was a lack of parent and community involvement. I listened carefully to what students were saying about their school experiences and their connections with adults. I knew from past experience that all these factors contributed to the negative school climate, but I was mainly interested in what was causing the challenging student behaviours to occur. This eventually became the Focus (Kaser & Halbert, 2017) for my master’s project. I wanted to seek the source of these
behaviours, but more importantly, I wanted to develop ways to assist teachers in improving them and possibly even preventing them from occurring in the first place. My first hunch (Kaser & Halbert, 2017) was that many students with behavioural challenges came from disadvantaged homes, but realized that even if this was so, it was important to only focus on factors that the school had control of. My hunches were that student learning challenges, lack of student ownership and responsibility, and lack of opportunities to have fun at school were factors contributing to challenging student behaviours. I knew it was time to reach out to the experts and their research on school climate. The next stage of the inquiry process was my Literature Review (Chapter 2), or the New Learning stage (Kaser & Halbert, 2017).

During my extensive review of literature and research-based evidence on school climate, relationships were a recurring theme. A school climate is commonly defined by how members of the school community perceive the quality of relationships in schools and research shows that student behaviour is directly influenced by these relationships. Most of the studies regarding impact of teacher, peer, family, staff, and administrator relationships on students focused on at-risk students. This led me to the work of Brendtro et al. (2002) on the Circle of Courage, a model based on Indigenous philosophies of child development. Relationships are the foundation for the principles of this model—sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity—and determine their success. “If these experiences do not exist, students are susceptible to social, psychological and learning problems,” (Ashworth, as cited in Bendtro et al., 2002). It is the sense of safety and belonging from positive relationships that emerges from these experiences creating student wellbeing and optimal learning. Human beings are naturally social creatures who are meant to live, work and play together in groups. (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).
The 21st-century learning skills in the BC Ministry of Education’s core competencies are an important pedagogy for this project. Learning in the 21st century involves experiencing a deep, fundamental shift in the basic principles of what is important for youth to be learning for success in their futures (Middleton, 2018). After extensive readings about Indigenous pedagogy and First Peoples Principles of Learning, I concluded that, for the most part, innovative ways of learning for the 21st-century and the goals of the New BC Curriculum (2018) align with Circle of Courage values. For instance, the Spirit of Mastery demands that students are engaged in meaningful learning experiences that take their needs and interests into consideration. It requires that teachers provide opportunities for inquiry, land and project-based learning and ensures students learn and represent their learning in a variety of ways. The Spirit of Independence refers to students feeling empowered through opportunities to make decisions, being responsible, and taking ownership of their learning.

Many of the Circle of Courage values are supported by the BC Curriculum, yet there are significant shortfalls in the design of the curriculum. First, it neglects to place emphasis on students’ emotional needs (love, acceptance, respect, and trust). For example, the Circle of Courage Spirit of Mastery relies on teachers to create safe, social learning environments for students to comfortably collaborate with peers and learn from elders and other community members. It means that teachers really need to know and understand their students if personal interests are to be considered. The Spirit of Independence demands that students be in trusting and respectful relationships, so they feel important, confident and empowered to make decisions and take responsibility for their own learning. Generosity, too, is all about relationships; it is based entirely on the caring of others and sharing with others. Essentially, relationships and the sense of belonging that comes from positive relationships, are key components of each principle
and must exist for mastery, independence and generosity to occur (Brendtro et al., 2002). This explains why I have chosen to focus on Sense of Belonging and relationships for this project (Chapter 4). Although all four values of the Circle of Courage must be experienced for a child to be complete, this will not happen if sense of belonging does not first occur. Another shortfall is the notion that Indigenous principles should be integrated into the curriculum when, in fact, Indigenous philosophy should be the curriculum into which everything else is embedded. By using the Circle of Courage, or similar models based on Indigenous principles, all the necessary components of child development and learning will be addressed, relationships with all members of the school community will flourish, and, as a result, students will develop the resilience and self-worth they need to be successful in their lives.

As I learned more about Indigenous philosophies on education and the Circle of Courage, I began to Take Action (Kaser & Halbert, 2017) by making changes in my own teaching practices and shifting my attitudes by looking at students through a different lens. In the past, I had made a point of connecting with my students and fostering a sense of community in my own classrooms. However, I now extend that effort beyond the realm of just my own students and consider all students my responsibility, to some extent. I view students with behaviour challenges in a different way; I recognize that students with the most challenging behaviours are often the ones who need support from loving, caring adults the most. By demonstrating more respect and tolerance for their behaviour I may be contributing to their overall wellbeing. I allow time in the morning and throughout the day for talking circles; providing time for the students and myself to listen to one another and allow students to participate in decision-making and problem-solving processes. I have been welcoming guest teachers into my classroom to not just model teaching practices that are more conducive to making learning meaningful for students but
also take advantage of their expert knowledge. Inquiry and Assessment for Learning have become foundations for learning in my classroom and my students are experiencing more time for outdoors, reflection and mindfulness. I have regular dialogue with colleagues about best ways to support the psychological needs of challenging children in our school, support those teachers who are having difficulty coping with challenging student behaviour, and encourage collaboration to find ways to foster relationships in our school community.

To learn more about implementing Circle of Courage principles in schools, I visited an alternative school (grades 1-12) that uses the Circle of Courage philosophy school-wide; I attended their school assembly and luncheon, visited with attending students, and interviewed two of the teachers to gain insight on how Circle of Courage concepts were incorporated in the classrooms. I also interviewed a colleague who participated in a school inquiry about using the Circle of Courage model and who continues to use this philosophy to create a sense of community and belonging within his classroom. I attended Monique Gray-Smith’s keynote address and workshop on belonging and identity and participated in a book club discussion on her book, *Speaking our Truth: A Journey of Reconciliation*. I participated in a workshop presented by the Comox Valley Child Development Association - Pathways to Healing Partnership. Their mandate is to provide ongoing capacity-building around student trauma in our school district.

A one-day workshop did not allow me to address all the Circle of Courage values in depth, so it made sense to focus on sense of belonging because of its impact on the other components. I found that Adaptive Schools’ strategies were the best way to address some of the other important Circle of Courage philosophies about best teaching practices by providing experiential learning opportunities that teach the content using the strategies we want teachers to
use in their classrooms. I attended a multi-day Adaptive Schools Foundation seminar in my
district to learn about the Adaptive Schools philosophy and strategies for presenting workshops.

**Target Audience**

The process of my inquiry is ongoing. I am constantly checking (Kaser & Halbert, 2017) to see if the changes in my practices and attitudes are making a difference in the lives of my students. My aim is to get the word out about the importance of relationships in the school community and to go beyond the climate of my own classroom to work collaboratively with colleagues to make a positive impact on the climate of our entire school. The reality is that teachers are faced with challenging student behaviours that are getting in the way of learning. These behaviours are on the rise and educators are seeking ways to enhance the wellbeing of students while coping with their own stresses.

The professional development workshop, Improving Student Behaviour Using the Circle of Courage, is designed for K-7 educators. This workshop is intended to inspire and motivate educators with experiential learning opportunities; opportunities that allow them to connect and collaborate with colleagues while finding ways to support the emotional needs of their students. Participants will experience the social nature of learning and the feelings of being accepted by others and being vulnerable. The workshop is ideal for staffs who are seeking ways to improve their school climates by improving student behaviour. It can also be a prelude to future school inquiries.

**Rationale for Workshop Format**

The aim of this project is to support educators in making a shift in their thinking and attitudes toward challenging student behaviour and discovering ways to nurture relationships using Indigenous philosophy on child development. I felt that a workshop format would allow
participants to learn concepts in the same innovative manner their students would. Workshops are an effective way to get an important message out and impact a larger audience (DiGiovanna, 2017). From the participants’ perspective, workshops can be inspiring, fun and an opportunity to be in a different environment and learn something new (Nerney, 2017). Workshops also provide opportunities for participants to network and gain expertise and new ideas to improve skills.

**Rationale for Adaptive Schools Workshop Format**

Using the Adaptive Schools format to present this workshop (Chapter 4) builds experiential understanding of the value and processes of collaborative inquiry and Indigenous approaches to child development, specifically the Circle of Courage model. Adaptive Schools strategies (Garmston & Wellman, 2018) are very much aligned with Indigenous principles of learning in that the elements of a professional community rely on trust, a shared purpose, collective efficacy, working and making decisions collaboratively and providing ongoing assessment and feedback (Garmston & Wellman, 2018).

“The knowledge we need to solve problems (in schools) often doesn’t reside close at hand; it has to be found through active inquiry and analysis” (Elmore, as cited in Garmston & Wellman, 2018). The adaptive leader is both a member of a group and an observer of the group and its environment. Adaptive leadership facilitates people in making difficult changes and nurtures the “skills sets for dialogue, discussion, productive conflict and pushing teachers to continually explore the relationship between curriculum, pedagogy, and student learning” (Garmston & Wellman, 2018). Adaptive leaders sell the problem not the solution. This aligns perfectly with the skills educators wish to nurture in their students.

To clarify my understanding and gain additional insight about applying Adaptive Schools strategies to teach Circle of Courage values, I attended an Adaptive Schools Foundation seminar,
offered by Comox Valley District 71, and received advice from a trained facilitator of Adaptive Schools. The Adaptive Schools Learning Guide (Garmston & Wellman, 2018) supported me in the design and planning of the workshop.

To make the learning for the participants of my workshop meaningful and practical, I wanted to ensure opportunities for experiential learning that aligned with the Circle of Courage philosophies were provided so they could then be implemented in their schools. Each segment of the workshop reflects Circle of Courage values that aim to foster positive relationships by including members of the entire school community. In schools, this would include peers, teachers, support staff, administration, families and knowledge keepers, elders and community members. In the workshop it would include teachers, Educational Assistants, administration, support staff, and possibly representative parents. It should be understood that the experience from which the content is learned is equally as valuable as the content (knowledge and information) itself. Participants work with a variety of people (partners and groups are always randomly chosen so participants experience diversity, inclusion, and tolerance). Random selection processes allow participants to move around the room to interact with others. The Adaptive Schools workshop allows for partner, small group, large group, and individual interactions. The dynamics of each situation are unique as it is important to hear a variety of perspectives but also have time for personal reflection.

**Implementation Plan**

The workshop has been designed on the basis of content analyzed in the literature review. The rationale for each workshop activity explains how relationships have the potential to flourish during learning experiences that address the Circle of Courage principles—sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity—and indicates which of the philosophies apply to them.
In addition, activity objectives, materials and suggested time durations are listed. Individual, partner, small and large group activities are provided to facilitate an understanding of challenging student behaviours, the powerful influence of relationships, and how challenging behaviours can be prevented and/or improved using the Circle of Courage principles.

It is ideal to conduct this workshop somewhere other than on school district property, preferably a conference room or retreat facility that allows teachers to get out of their typical working environments and into a relaxed, natural setting. The indoor area needs to be large enough for participants to move freely, walk, or stand when needed. Ideally there would be many windows providing natural light and a door to access outside. Outdoor cooking and grassy seating areas must be available.

This project is presented in the form of a one-day workshop for K-7 educators. The intent is to present this workshop to my current staff, a team of 20 that includes teachers, education assistants, administration, and support staff. It is ideal for school teams who work collaboratively to set shared goals and develop plans to extend learning in future sessions. It is a valuable opportunity for members of the team to bond by sharing their ideas and feelings in a relaxed, natural setting. The activities allow time for reflection, discussion, sharing of ideas, and development of relationships that contribute to optimal learning.

Indigenous ways of being will be woven into the workshop activities as much as possible, i.e., Indigenous stories, symbols, art and music—to demonstrate ways that teachers can do the same in their classrooms. For example, to enhance the social nature of learning and sense of belonging, and to include Indigenous ways of sharing and developing relationships, workshop participants will gather together to eat a traditional Indigenous meal. This workshop would be
more meaningful and authentic if co-facilitated with a district First Nations worker who supports the Circle of Courage model.

**Looking Forward**

Upon the completion of this applied master’s project, this workshop will be available for other school staff as a starting point for understanding challenging student behaviour and using the Circle of Courage to assist them in developing a plan to improve school climate by nurturing relationships within the school community. Depending on the conditions and goals of individual schools, Adaptive Schools strategies may be modified or adapted.
Chapter 4: Design Project

This chapter outlines the workshop on “Improving Student Behaviour Using the Circle of Courage.” Provided for each workshop component is a description, the objectives, the rationale (how it is connected to the Circle of Courage philosophy and why the specific Adaptive Schools strategy was chosen), and suggested materials and time duration.

The details of the works are on the following pages. Please refer to the workshop Keynote presentation slides, “Improving Student Behaviour Using the Circle of Courage” in Appendix D. (If you are reading an electronic version of this document, you may also double-click on the icon below to get access to the presentation.)
Professional Development Workshop for K-7 Educators:
Improving Student Behaviour Using the Circle of Courage

Workshop Goals

• To demonstrate how relationships affect student behaviour

• to demonstrate how the Circle of Courage principles—sense of belonging, mastery, independence and generosity—affect student wellbeing

• to demonstrate ways to nurture relationships to improve challenging student behaviours by using The Circle of Courage

• To demonstrate ways to embed Indigenous culture and pedagogy in classrooms and schools

Workshop Activities

I. Meet and Greet:

Charity Donation

Objectives: to donate to local charity (i.e., food bank, homeless shelter) make social connections with other workshop participants, sharing of food

Description: greeting, sign-in, package pick-up, meet-and-greet (snacks and beverages)

Rationale: In Indigenous cultures, generosity is considered the most important virtue and training children to be generous started at an early age when mothers would give their children food to give to the needy or bring to elders, just so they could experience the feeling of giving without expecting something in return (Brendtro, 2002). Helping others improves self-worth which takes away the preoccupation with self. According to Brendtro and Ness (1983), troubled youth increase their self-worth when they have opportunities to care for others.
Materials: keynote slide showing workshop title and Circle of Courage medicine wheel, donation bins, sign-in and participant contact sheet

Duration: 30 minutes

II. Introduction:

Objectives:

- to introduce presenter and participants, review contents of participant packages, provide an overview for the workshop and answer any questions from participants

Description: Participants will work in pairs and small groups to gain an overview of theories presented in this workshop and have opportunity to explore and discuss their understanding.

Spirit Partners Activity – an Adaptive Schools strategy that facilitates random partner groupings: participants circulate the room to find four different people who could potentially form partnerships with them throughout the day. Names are recorded on their Spirit Page.

Overview - A handout is provided to demonstrate how aspects of the BC Curriculum, First Peoples Principles of Learning, OECD’s Seven Principles of Learning and Circle of Courage align, particularly as they pertain to innovative ways of learning. The presenter points out the Indigenous belief that relationships and sense of belonging are vital components of child development (Brendtro et al., 2002) and that emotional and cognitive development are strongly correlated; “Emotions are the gatekeepers for learning” (OECD, 2010). Although the BC’s New Curriculum (BC Ministry of Education, 2015) addresses relationships, self-identity, and belonging intermittently throughout the curriculum, it does not indicate their significance and excludes the topic of school climate, in which quality of relationships are a crucial factor. Keynote slides will demonstrate that BC Health recognizes the significance of school
CIRCLE OF COURAGE

connectedness and the Ontario Ministry of Education includes School Climate as a major component of their curriculum.

**Rationale:** provides an opportunity to briefly meet other workshop participants (Ice breaker) and provide an overview for the events of the day. West Coast animals are represented on the Spirit Page, providing an example of how Indigenous perspectives can be woven into activities.

**Materials:** projector, screen, participant packages (handouts, notepad and pen with Indigenous artwork, Spirit Page, ticket for draws), coffee/tea/water, fresh fruit, and baked goods assortment.

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Activity 1 - Fireside Chat**

**Objective:** To help create a sense of belonging and inclusion.

**Description:** The facilitator will give a brief explanation for the Grounding strategy (Adaptive Schools). To form groups of four, each participant will use their West Coast Animal Card to find three other group members with different animal cards. Once in small groups, each member will take turns speaking. The other group members will listen without commenting, asking questions or making any gestures or sounds of agreement/disagreement (i.e., “uh-huh,” “I see”). After each person has a turn, the first speaker (hummingbird) will summarize for the larger group.

Each group member will be asked to share the following information:

- My name is . . .
- My relationship to this topic is . . .
- My expectations are . . .
- How I feel about being here is . . .
**Rationale:** (Sense of Belonging). This Adaptive Schools strategy establishes a norm for respectful listening, brings people in the here and now, gets every person’s voice in the room in a non-confrontive way, establishing a verbal territory for each participant from which it will be easier to speak at a later time, allows people to connect with one another, allows for the expression of hopes and apprehensions (vulnerability), values and thinking, and surfaces any concerns on the topic or other feelings.

**Materials:** West Coast animal cards (Salmon, Beaver, Frog, Hummingbird) – 1 per participant

**Duration:** 30 minutes

**Activity Two: Jigsaw Expert**

**Objectives:** To develop an understanding of Circle of Courage principles and demonstrate how learning can be achieved in meaningful ways when students are working collaboratively, have choice in how they demonstrate what they have learned and are held accountable for their learning.

**Description:** Participants will each receive a puzzle piece from the facilitator. Each piece is part of a whole puzzle which represents one of the four Circle of Courage values – Belonging, Mastery, Independence, and Generosity. Participants move around the room to find the other pieces to their puzzle. Once the puzzle is completed, they will have formed their expert groups in which they will complete the readings and participate in dialogue.

After participants have gained a solid understanding of their topics, they will form their multi-expert (HOME) groups by locating participants with puzzle pieces from each of the other three Circle of Courage quadrants to form their new teaching groups of four. In these new groups,
each participant is responsible for explaining their topics to the other group members. They must be able to answer questions and clarify understanding for other group members.

**Rationale:** (Sense of Belonging, Mastery, and Independence) This Adaptive Schools co-operative learning strategy encourages listening, engagement, and empathy by giving each member of the group an essential part to play in learning. Group members must work together as a team to accomplish a common goal: to become an expert on their topic. This contributes to establishing a sense of belong. Participants are also required to take ownership of their learning and demonstrate responsibility by passing on information to others. Experts will then return to their original HOME group and “teach” the other members of their group about their topic. Advantages to this type of learning are that it makes the learning more meaningful, it is collaborative (social), and all group members will be accountable because they are expected to be experts on their topics. Participants will recognize this strategy as an efficient way to learn about a large topic as it breaks the reading down into more manageable pieces and participants are not expected to read the entire reading. Note that aspects of the Spirit of Independence principle are experienced in this activity, as students must demonstrate ownership of learning and sense of responsibility. Also note that Sense of Belonging is developed through sharing of a common goal, working as a team to access and understand information, and communicating effectively. Relationships continue to develop during this activity.

**Materials:** One puzzle piece per participant, copies of readings (Chapter 3: Reclaiming Youth At-Risk: Reclaiming Hope for the Future, 2002, pp. 30-52. One per participant), highlighter pens

**Duration:** 30 minutes
**Activity Three: Video Presentation**: First Nations Principles of Learning; School District 27 Residential Schools and Reconciliation, Brokenleg https://youtu.be/0PgrfCVCt_

**Objectives**: To solidify understanding of Circle of Courage principles and learn from an expert

**Description**: A brief interview of Martin Brokenleg, co-creator of the Circle of Courage and member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Doctor of Psychology, counselor and teacher. will summarize and/or clarify understanding of the Circle of Courage model

**Rationale**: (Sense of Belonging and Mastery) To listen to and gain knowledge from an expert. Ideally one of the creators would attend the workshop in person. This activity supports the Mastery principle of the Circle of Courage that recognizes the advantages of learning from knowledge-keepers and community experts.

**Materials**: projector, screen, WIFI, speakers

**Duration**: 8 minutes

**Activity Four: Ten/Two** What is it about the video that resonates with you?

**Objectives**: To reflect on, process and help retain information regarding Circle of Courage principles and to engage learners.

**Description**: An Adaptive Schools strategy that gives participants processing time after receiving content. The facilitator provides time for participants to talk about what they just heard, respond to facilitator prompts, raise questions, or in other ways engage with the material. First, participants discuss in pairs for several minutes (facilitator needs to “read” the level of engagement to determine duration). Each pair then joins another set of partners for further discussion, followed by a large group discussion.
Rationale: (Sense of Mastery, Mastery, Independence and Generosity) To engage learners and reinforce learning by connecting and sharing feelings and ideas with others. Participants are allowed at least two minutes of processing time with every ten minutes of teach lecture or presentation. It is the two minutes that supports comprehensible output, negotiating meaning, and a risk-free environment to try new vocabulary and concepts with someone the student understands – another student. By focusing in short spurts of important knowledge and understandings, lessons are delivered in small 10-minute “chunks.” Students are given a reflective question to focus their thinking and discussions. This activity requires participants to show vulnerability and to listen respectfully. Participants will further reinforce their sense of belonging (relationship building), mastery and Independence.

Materials: n/a

Duration: 10 minutes

Book Draw (Generosity) – *Reclaiming Youth at Risk* by Bentro et al., 2002.

**BREAK** – SNACKS PROVIDED (Generosity)

Duration: 15 minutes – Digital clock is projected on screen to show countdown of break duration.

**Activity Five: First Turn, Last Turn**

Workshop Objective: To learn how schools have adopted the Circle of Courage as an educational compass to “relate to the reluctant,” (Brendtro et al, 2000, p. 71).
**Description:** Individuals read a section of text from Brendtro et al.’s *Reclaiming Youth At-Risk: Reclaiming Hope for the Future*, (2002, pp. 71-87). Individuals highlight sections of text that have special meaning for them. In small groups, each person in turn shares an item he or she highlighted but does not comment on it. Group members take turns commenting on the item named with no cross talk. The person who named the item then shares his or her thinking about the item and thereby has the last word. The pattern is repeated around the table.


**Rationale:** (Sense of Belonging, Mastery and Independence) To engage in dialogue and collaborative inquiry. It develops an appreciation for the power of listening and the personal and shared learning possibilities in exploring diverse perspectives. This strategy provides a clear protocol that is especially helpful for newly forming groups and for any groups working with controversial topics or technically complex information.

**Materials:** multiple copies of Brendtro et al, 2000, pp. 71-87, highlighter pens

**Duration:** 45 minutes

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**Activity Six: Storytelling**

**Objectives:** To demonstrate how opportunities to show generosity contribute to wellbeing and to demonstrate how storytelling can be used in the classroom to teach students important messages.

**Description:** Participants sit in half circle to listen to and observe storytelling by facilitator.

**Rationale:** (Sense of Belonging and Generosity) Indigenous storytelling is a foundation for holistic learning, relationship building, and experiential learning. It engages learners and often
demonstrates human traits and humour that all people share. Stories can give guidance by providing morals and ethics to live by. Empathy and personal affirmation can be developed. (Restoule, Jean-Paul and Chaw-win-is, 2017).

**Materials:** Picture Book – *A Salmon for Simon* by Betty Waterton (Author), Ann Blades (Illustrator). Premise of story - a little boy, Simon, shows generosity to a salmon in this award-winning book.

**Duration:** 20 minutes

Book Draw (Generosity) – *Speaking Our Truth: A Pathway to Reconciliation* by Monique Gray Smith

**LUNCHEON**

**Objective:** To provide an opportunity for co-workers to bond and socialize and to participate in an authentic West Coast Indigenous culinary experience.

**Description:** Smoked salmon will be prepared outdoors over an open fire by an Indigenous member of the local community. Fresh bannock will be served with Salish herbal jam with hibiscus flowers. Also served is bison sausages and fresh mussels. Herbal teas and a variety of other beverages will be offered. Seating is outdoors. An elder will say a prayer.

**Rationale:** (Sense of Belonging and Generosity) - Feasts are a way of expressing gratitude and sharing culture. It is an opportunity to demonstrate respect for others.

**Materials:** dishes and cutlery, benches, tables, chairs, table clothes, menu items

**Duration:** 60 minutes
Activity Eight: Corners

Objectives: to deepen understanding of Circle of Courage values and to learn a strategy to use with students

Description: Participants choose one of six quotes displayed. Each quote is indicative of one of the four Circle of Courage values. Each of the quotes is recorded on chart paper posted throughout the room. Participants will decide which quote intrigues them the most and go to the corresponding poster paper. Once interest-based groups have been formed, participants will brainstorm ideas that attempt to define and/or explain the quote and record their ideas on the chart paper. Group members will be assigned specific roles (readers, recorders, facilitators, speakers, presenters). Each group decides how they will demonstrate their quote to the large group who will guess which Circle of Courage principle they are demonstrating. Demonstrations can be expressed in any way the group decides (i.e., skit, poem, drawing, etc.).

Rationale: (Sense of Belonging, Mastery, Independence, Generosity) This Adaptive Schools strategy is a learning opportunity that promotes choice and shows respect for individual interests. Students are engaged in learning when they are working with a topic they are interested in and members are accountable for their learning as they each have a role to fulfill and are expected to take part in demonstrating their knowledge and understanding.

Materials: poster paper, felt markers

Duration: 50 minutes

Activity Eight: Cedar Weaving

Objective: to weave a hanging heart or small basket
Description: participants will sit at tables where supplies have been distributed and observe the teachings of a knowledge keeper while listening to his/her story and weaving hearts and baskets.

Rationale: (Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity) To learn by listening, observation, and hands-on experience. Bringing in a knowledge keeper to teach how to weave using cedar strips creates a sense of belonging because participants are connecting with Indigenous community members and learning from experts first-hand. The knowledge keeper is trusting the participants to learn with practice and patience, through careful observation and listening. Learning by experience will be more meaningful than being told how to do it with step-by-step instructions.

Materials: cedar strips, buckets of water, twine

Duration: 60 MINUTES

Activity Nine: Journal Reflection (Sense of Belonging)

Objective: to reflect and respond to the weaving activity or any other insights from the day’s experiences.

Description: Participants will reflect on what they have learned about the Circle of Courage and how this might affect their own teaching practices in the future. This reflection time will take place outdoors in a quiet, private space.

Rationale: A reflective journal is a personal record of student’s learning experiences. It is a space where a learner can record and reflect upon their observations and responses to situations, which can then be used to explore and analyse ways of thinking.

Materials: notepaper and pen/pencil from participant folder

Duration: 15 minutes
Activity Ten: Talking Circle (Sense of Belonging, Generosity)

Objective: Participants will share their feelings, experiences and insights in response to the assigned topic. They are expected to adhere to rules that promote the goals of the process while assuring cooperation, effective communication, trust and confidentiality.

Description: Standing in an outdoor area, participants arrange themselves in a circle. Participants take turns sharing something meaningful they will take away from them for the workshop. This could be something they recorded in their journal reflection.

Rationale: Sharing Circles provide a consistent, structured and safe place for students to develop self-awareness and a feeling vocabulary through sharing their feelings, thoughts and experiences (and listening to others doing the same). It allows for the development of the ability to understand and manage emotions and control impulses and to build relationships.

Materials: talking stick

Duration: 20 minutes

Activity 10 – Conclusion, Presenter Evaluation, Gift Giving

Objective: to provide a summary of the day and present gifts to participants, allow time for participants to share verbal and written feedback on the day.

Description: large group discussion and completion of presenter feedback form

Materials: Circle of Courage metal tokens (gifts), feedback form

Rationale: (Sense of Generosity and Belonging)
Chapter 5: Conclusions, Limitations and Recommendations

Main Findings and Connections

As most of the research explored in this paper shows, the most significant factors contributing to positive student behaviour are the resilience and self-worth that come from having a sense of belonging and feeling connected to members of the school community. These relationships that provide love, trust, acceptance, and respect from teachers, peers, staff, families, and members of the community, empower students to become competent, responsible, and caring human beings. When students are resilient they are better equipped to deal with life’s adversities and accept challenges face-on. When they have self-worth, they are more accepting of diversity and have the confidence to grow in their learning. When the four values of the Circle of Courage are complete, the child is “whole” and has wellbeing. This is a child who is respectful of the world around them, is engaged in learning, and contributes to the school community in positive ways. The school this child belongs to has a positive school climate.

Having time to reflect on my own relationships within the school community, increasing my understanding of how I influence others, and Indigenous views on child development will have an impact on how I interact with students in the future. Extending my connections with my own students beyond the classroom and reaching out to other students in the school is important to me. Increased understanding about restorative justice and Indigenous views of discipline will inspire me to look beyond my own needs when faced with challenging student behaviours and help me to be more sensitive to their needs. I am reminded of the power of listening, patience, vulnerability, and humour.

I have very little control over the interactions of others in the school community. However, I can encourage and model ways to nurture peer, family, and community relationships
and I can continue to invite teachers to engage in professional learning about school climate and relationships. This process has confirmed the necessity of not only engaging teachers in understanding Indigenous philosophies and co-creating positive school climate, but also engaging parents by creating opportunities for them to interact with their child inside the school and taking an active role in their child’s learning. Finally, I will persevere in my attempts to create experiences in my school that foster multi-age peer interactions and school-wide events in an attempt to engage students and nurture their relationships with peers and staff.

**Action Plan for Implementing this Workshop**

Upon completion of this major project, I will put my design into place in the following ways: I will begin by offering this workshop to my own staff, as I know they will be motivated to improve student behaviour at my school. Offering it during the August Professional Development Days will increase the likelihood of attendance and provide a bonding experience before the start of the new school year. It will be an opportunity to create a shared vision and to set goals. My plan is to propose a year-long staff-inquiry process that focuses on improving student behaviour by using the Circle of Courage. We would invite students and parents to be part of the process.

One of my next steps is to attend a Circle of Courage workshop to increase my understanding about Indigenous child development philosophies. This could potentially help me to build on my own workshop and find new ways to help improve relationships at my school. Formal training for working with at-risk students provided by Circle of Courage trainers would be beneficial as well.
Limitations

One of my limitations was my uncertainty about how I, as a non-Indigenous educator, could ethically present and argue for Indigenous principles and processes to improve school climate and student behaviour. I engaged in this learning journey nonetheless because the Circle of Courage values aligned so perfectly with the issues my school was facing and offered a practical framework that made it seem possible to overcome them. I also believe educators have an obligation to teach students about Indigenous perspectives on land, culture and people. Restoule and Chaw-win-is (2017) questioned how Canadians can fully understand geography and history without engaging with Indigenous perspectives on historical events. However, Restoule & Chaw-win-is also pointed out that “thoughtful teachers can be cautious to teach in an Indigenous way, since they hesitate sharing stories about themselves or telling stories from a culture that is not their own” (p. 16). Teachers, often afraid of appropriation, offending others, or providing inaccurate information are hesitant to teach Indigenous perspectives. It is this fear that creates barriers for teachers (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017). I expect there are educators who will be reluctant to attend my workshop.

Regardless, educators need to get over their fears and accept responsibility for being part of the reconciliation process (Restoule & Chaw-win-is, 2017). By accepting permission to make mistakes, engaging in inquiry along with students, and building relationships with knowledge keepers so they can be sources of knowledge in the classroom, educators can begin, bit by bit, to contribute to social change. Educators must realize that they have to start somewhere and that small steps matter. I need to model this open-mindedness to my colleagues and have the courage to move forward.
A potential limitation, moving forward, might be gaining permission as well as time and resources to offer this workshop in future. Teachers have few full eight-hour days off; convincing the Professional Development teams to allow me to focus on this and recruit for it may be challenging. Another barrier to participation may come as a result of those above-stated fears, and the levels of disengagement that many teachers feel. However, I choose to remain optimistic and am motivated to make changes.

Another limitation is the failure of teachers, especially beginning teachers, to recognize their potential to affect school climate by establishing positive relationships with their students, parents, colleagues, and administration. This is largely due to the lack of recognition that school climate receives in teacher education (Cohen et al., 2009).

The logistics of the design project presents its own limitations. It was challenging to fit everything I wanted to cover into a one-day workshop. It could easily be extended to a two-day workshop. Financial resources might also be an issue. Locating a venue in a natural setting that has an affordable fee could be challenging. The additional cost of providing a specialty luncheon and door prizes might also be problematic.

**Implications and Recommendations**

I have learned that teachers who are following any of the practices listed below may not realize they are already Indigenizing their classrooms by doing the following:

- get out beyond the walls of the classroom
- involve the whole community in teaching
- get away from competitive individualism
- include stories, talking circles, land-based learning, and student-focused teaching
• provide a space for students to speak honestly while also respecting student silence and encourage students to really listen to each other
• provide opportunities for decision-making and problem-solving, for students to explore themselves and a diversity of teaching methods to accommodate different learning styles
• allow diversity in demonstrating knowledge
• include hands-on and project-based learning experiences
• invite guest speakers
• create spaces that provide a sense of belonging and community where student safety is maintained
• encourage respect for all

Restoule & Chaw-win-is (2017) suggested educators even go beyond these practices, strategies, techniques, and actions of Indigenous pedagogy and also consider the Indigenous “way of being” by having the right attitude, orientation, approach, and ethics. This will not happen overnight, but teachers must be willing to take risks and be part of the learning journey.

I feel I have a great deal to learn about Indigenous pedagogy and child development and will strive to increase my knowledge and understanding in order to pass it on to others and improve my own teaching practices. I would also benefit from expanding my Adaptive Schools strategies repertoire to improve my presentation skills.

It would be beneficial to new teachers if universities would include a required course on positive school climate as part of the teacher education program.

Conclusion
The Circle of Courage model provides a framework for schools that wish to address all components of child development: Sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. This Indigenous holistic approach ensures that the spiritual, mental, and physical needs of students are met through positive relationships and meaningful experiences. Schools are in an ideal position to reach all students, including those at risk, to ensure they feel loved, cared for and respected. Using the Circle of Courage requires teachers to make shifts in their attitudes; a shift that will assist them in making their students “whole” and help restore those whose lives have been broken. I truly believe that this shift in thinking must also be reflected in the curriculum by addressing school climate. If Indigenous perspectives were truly being respected in the curriculum, First Peoples Principles would be the curriculum. Using the Circle of Courage would not only ensure that all learning competencies of the curriculum would be met but would also ensure the humanistic competencies required for positive school climates would also be satisfied.

**Personal and professional learning.** My personal learning journey is reflected in the Circle of Courage core principles: Sense of belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. The opportunity to grow as a learner, an educator, and as a person alongside like-minded individuals, has been life-changing. The connections I have made instilled courage and confidence, enabling me to be more vulnerable and willing to take risks (sense of belonging). This journey has opened up opportunities for me to participate in inquiry and to share my knowledge with colleagues (mastery). Following a direction led by my personal passions and interests required independence. I am hopeful that my work will assist others who work with those students who are desperate for positive relationships in their lives. Finally, the generosity that my friends, family, and colleagues have demonstrated throughout this process is
overwhelming; without their willingness to share their time, resources, knowledge, skills, expertise, and understanding, I am certain I would not have been able to achieve what I have.
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Appendix A: Jigsaw Expert

Appendix B: West Coast Animal Cards

![Hummingbird](https://shop.slcc.ca/learn/the-hummingbird/)

![Salmon](https://shop.slcc.ca/learn/the-salmon/)

![Beaver](https://shop.slcc.ca/learn/the-beaver/)

![Frog](https://shop.slcc.ca/learn/the-frog/)

*Figure 7: West Coast Animal Cards using images taken from First Nations Museum webpage. Used with Permission from Native Northwest. Retrieved April 30, 2019, from https://shop.slcc.ca/legends-symbology/ ©Squamish Lil-wat Cultural Centre*
Appendix C: Spirit Partners