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# Exploring the complexity of policy enactment through stories: A sociomaterial informed study.

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Graduate Program in Education

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## Abstract

This qualitative research study explores the meaning(s) Aboriginal education leads and school board administrators give to the *Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Policy Framework* (hereafter referred to as the Framework) and how these meaning(s) are negotiated, storied, and enacted to produce particular processes, outcomes, and effects within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. The principles of Critical Narrative Research (CNR) combined with the sensibilities of Actor Network Theory (ANT) are drawn on to foreground the policy actors involved in the implementation of the Framework. Recruitment of research participants took place across both public and Catholic school boards in Ontario, Canada. Qualitative narrative methods were employed to collect data from 13 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education leads and school board administrators who are or were previously involved in initiatives aimed at meeting the primary objectives outlined in the Framework. Analysis of data reveals some inconsistency between the values espoused at the Ministry level and what becomes enacted across provincial school boards. Participants identified a number of factors that influenced the extent to which their individual school board delivered programs, services, and supports to build the capacity of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students and staff. Depending on how these factors intersected with one another, the resulting actions produced both productive and destructive effects, sometimes concurrently. An interrogation of discourses around educational achievement is made prominent throughout this study, demonstrating how knowledge and learning is generated through the process and effects of social and material forces coming together.

Keywords: Indigenous education; education policy; sociomaterial; narrative inquiry; educational achievement

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## **Chapter One: Introduction to the Study**

### **Positioning the Researcher**

It is no surprise I chose to become a teacher. I have had many great teachers over the course of my lifetime who opened my eyes to how rewarding a career in education might be. Needless to say, when I finally had the opportunity to enter the classroom as a teacher in a remote First Nations community in Northern Ontario, I was ecstatic. It was not long, however, until those feelings of excitement were soon replaced with feelings of defeat. Throughout the two years I spent teaching in a small Cree community, I struggled to engage students in their learning - to identify and create opportunities for my students to introduce their experiences and knowledge into the classroom. Why did I not question the possibility that the structure of the educational system in which I had been educated might have benefited some people while not others?

It has been over five years since I left the First Nations community where I began my teaching career. I have been away from the community longer than I lived there, yet it seems like only yesterday I made the trek from Southern Ontario to Northern Ontario to begin what has been one of the most rewarding, yet challenging, chapters in both my professional and personal life. Reflecting upon my experiences teaching in a remote First Nations community in Northern Ontario led me to examine my assumptions surrounding the social, environmental, economic, and political realities permeating the educational experiences of many Indigenous students in Canada. I was unable to recognize the cultural and academic needs of my students, given my education in a system that has historically and systemically devalued Indigenous cultural knowledge. How could I provide my students with what they needed when I had not received the training, support, and resources required to deliver appropriate educational programming for the

cultural context I was working within? I began to see how the hidden curriculum (Kelly, 2009) had affected me. It was not until I had experienced teaching in a cultural context different from my own that I was able to see the prevailing and often contradictory discourses around Indigenous student achievement and engagement that had normalized my understanding of the purpose and practices of school.

As a non-Indigenous woman, my formative thinking had been shaped by curricula that did not address the origins of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, or the impact and legacy of colonialism on Indigenous communities in Canada. My educational experiences had been housed within Catholic school systems in urban centres in Southwestern Ontario. Similarly, my post-secondary experiences, including my preservice education training, took place in large-scale, westernized institutions in Ontario. As a result of the Eurocentric educational experiences I experienced as a student, my practice as a teacher perpetuated those conceptualizations.

It was during my first years as a teacher that I began to think about how teaching Indigenous students in the same way as I, a non-Indigenous student was prepared, might be problematic. Prior to teaching in Northern Ontario, I had never considered the power and privilege my Caucasian skin colour granted me. There was never a need to. I viewed my experiences and opportunities throughout life as well-deserved. My successes, I believed, were my own and achieved through hard work, not because of my skin colour. How could the colour of my skin contribute to another's experience of disadvantage, loss, or alienation?

I continue to struggle with this question. However, through writing about my teaching experiences and my pursuit of graduate studies, I am beginning to recognize how my ease in securing a teaching position, the feelings of entitlement I carried, the discomfort I felt being an outsider while clinging to the fact that eventually the discomfort would pass, and the

dichotomous distinctions I set up as boundaries to protect myself from “them” exemplify some of what my privilege affords me. After leaving the community, I eventually could see the conditions of daily experience I took for granted. For a long time, I carried heavy feelings of guilt for not having done more while I was teaching. I grew increasingly ashamed at what my privilege had afforded me. It was not until a professor shared with me the following feedback on an assignment I had completed for her course that I experienced a shift in my thinking:

You must forgive yourself for being a well-intentioned human...You are part of a larger narrative about what it means to be a “good” teacher...think about directing some of your disappointment at the system rather than at yourself...You know better now so focus on what you can contribute to help future teachers (K. Hibbert, personal communication, February 2013).

With the words of Bishop (2002) echoing in my mind -“guilt means taking on all the weight of history as an individual; responsibility means accepting your share of the challenge of changing the situation” (p. 115) - I approach this research as an opportunity to interrogate how discourses of achievement are perpetuated and translated into Aboriginal educational policy within the province of Ontario; secondly, I will consider how these discourses are storied, negotiated, and enacted by the individuals responsible for translating such policy text into action. I situate my understanding of policy enactment with the work of Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) who describe policy enactment as a process involving “interaction and inter-connection between diverse actors, texts, talk, technology, and objects which constitute ongoing responses to policy, sometimes durable, sometimes fragile, within networks and chains (p. 3). These ideas will be further explored throughout the dissertation.

## **Research Problem**

According to the Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat (2005), “Prosperous and healthy Aboriginal communities create a better future for Aboriginal children and youth” (p. 2). This quotation reflects the vision behind Ontario, Canada’s governmental report, entitled *Ontario’s New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs*, released by the McGuinty government in June, 2005. This report was published in direct response to feedback received from First Nations and Aboriginal leaders and organizations across Ontario in 2004 about their experiences and interactions with the province. Responses throughout Aboriginal communities across the province identified improving services for children and youth as a key concern. Emphasized throughout discussions with Aboriginal leaders was the “paramount importance of findings Aboriginal solutions to Aboriginal concerns” (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, 2005, p. 1).

*Ontario’s New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs* confirmed a commitment by the government to improving the quality of life for Aboriginal children and youth and building stronger relationships with Aboriginal communities across the province. In particular, this document highlighted the government’s commitment to ensuring Aboriginal students have access to high quality education that will improve educational outcomes among Aboriginal children and youth (Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, 2005). Acting on this commitment, the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) identified Aboriginal education as one of its key priorities. In 2007, the OME developed the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (hereafter referred to as the Framework). The Framework outlines the OME’s commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educational stakeholders to increase the capacity of the education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of the estimated 50, 312 Aboriginal students who attend provincially-funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario:

The Ministry of Education has identified Aboriginal education as one of its key priorities, with a focus on meeting two primary challenges by the year 2016—to improve achievement among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the areas of literacy and numeracy, retention of students in school, graduation rates, and advancement to postsecondary studies. (p. 5)

The policy outlines the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry, school boards, and schools to improve the academic achievement of Aboriginal students across the province of Ontario. The Framework includes 10 performance measures to gauge the success of the Ministry, school boards, and schools in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Additionally, the policy emphasizes the Ministry’s commitment to working with FNMI communities and organizations to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal students at all levels of learning.

In order to assess progress toward the goals of improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, the Ministry has encouraged boards to develop policies for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification. *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Students* (2007a) was released following the Framework to support Ontario school boards in their development of effective Aboriginal student self-identification policies and practices. According to the Ministry, the inability to identify First Nation, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students who live within the jurisdictions of Ontario school boards has proven challenging for gauging student achievement of FNMI students in Ontario. Having voluntary, confidential self-identification policies in place across Ontario school boards has been identified by the Ministry as a key target in the implementation of the Framework. The Ministry suggests that the gathering of “relevant and valid data” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b, p. 10) will support board improvement planning and accountability, as well as inform future policy and

funding decisions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b). To communicate the province's advancement in meeting the Framework's objectives, the Ministry has provided progress reports every three years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009; 2013) and most recently released the *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* to support continued implementation of the Framework by the Ministry and school boards from 2013 through to 2016 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

The OME has identified the Framework as a key component in increasing knowledge and awareness of FNMI cultures, histories, and perspectives among both students and educators across the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b). Since its release in 2007, emerging interpretive and critical analyses of this policy have been published. Proponents credit the Framework as contributing positively to the resurgence of Aboriginal knowledge systems in the educational context (Kearns, 2013; Sawyer, 2013). Further analyses (Anuik & Kearns, 2014; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Cherubini, 2010; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Butler, 2015; Kearns & Anuik, 2015) have indicated that the policy falls short of being the catalyst for creating and maintaining culturally affirming learning opportunities that empower Aboriginal students. In particular, the rhetoric used by the Ontario government to situate Aboriginal education as a priority has been closely scrutinized within the relevant literatures. Cherubini & Hodson (2008) highlight "an inherent conflict of expectations" (p. 183) between the expressed intent and practices outlined within the Framework documents and how the Ministry and school boards have in fact responded to the strategies and actions outlined in the Framework to help improve the engagement, learning, achievement, and well-being of Aboriginal students. Butler (2015) echoes these findings, pointing out a discursive shift in the direction of Ontario's Aboriginal education policy over time, indicating "a significant shift away from substantive

action to resolve the education gap and toward the apparent collection of data for its own sake” (p. 45). The substantial emphasis placed on collecting, analyzing, and reporting data for self-identified Aboriginal students as a measure for gauging Aboriginal student achievement figures prominently throughout the Framework and succeeding government reports. Cherubini et al. (2010) argue that continuous references to reducing gaps in student achievement via quantitative measures, as well as the centralization and standardization of curriculum and testing, is largely misdirected:

The concept of the “gap” is in itself culturally insensitive because it espouses individual achievement of students’ proficiency and achievement over a more collective sense of community well-being. It implies competitive overtones whereby the success of Aboriginal students, according to Eurocentric measures of what it means to be successful, falls short of norm-referenced, average scores. It is a capitalist oriented paradigm meant to dissect achievement in quantitative and empirical terms, and in so doing isolates achievement according to individuals and cohorts. (p.340)

Conceptualizations of achievement as indicated above fail to acknowledge how the gap represents a far more significant conceptual void between two epistemologies and cultural identities.

The explicit, central argument made by the authors referenced above, as well as within the Framework, is that a reaffirmation of and engagement with Indigenous cultures and knowledge is imperative to improving education outcomes for Aboriginal students in Ontario. Nonetheless, the findings from these same studies consistently revealed disparities between what the Framework espouses and how the initiatives outlined in the Framework are enacted. This leads me to wonder whether the broader construct of achievement, as it figures prominently in



policy discourses and education practices concerning Aboriginal education in Ontario, is misguided. Demographic and educational attainment statistics show that Ontario's Aboriginal students are falling behind, but what these statistics fail to do is consider the broader context within which Aboriginal students are required to perform and identify.

Conventional understandings of achievement within the context of Aboriginal education both nationally and within the province of Ontario focus solely on discrepancies in educational outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). These measurement approaches are oriented toward measuring deficits in the areas of literacy and numeracy, retention of students in school, graduation rates, and advancement to post-secondary studies achievement. This is problematic for two reasons. First, such measurement approaches neglect to consider the holistic nature of Aboriginal learning that engages and develops all aspects of the individual (emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual). This learning is deeply-rooted in language, relationships, and culture, and is lifelong; it permeates all areas of a learner's life and community (Battiste, 2013; The Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002). As a result, present-day conceptualizations of achievement are narrowly-defined, rarely reflecting the strengths, needs, day-to-day realities, and aspirations of Indigenous peoples (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Secondly, such narrow conceptualizations of what achievement is and how it should be cultivated prevents educational stakeholders from recognizing that there are other, often competing, elements at play beyond those humans generate.

**Recent trends in measuring educational achievement.** A near obsession with measuring academic success has manifested on a global scale. The sense that schools were failing was cemented in the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983, sparking a wave of

educational reform efforts to combat academic underachievement. When the focus became achievement and the way to determine it became measurement and standardization, what resulted was an increase in policies and reporting practices aimed at assessing the quality of teaching and learning at all educational levels. Canada did not go unaffected by the surge in educational reform efforts. On the contrary, attention in recent years has focused on comparing and measuring the educational outcomes of the Aboriginal population in Ontario with that of the non-Aboriginal population. The incessant documenting and reporting of educational achievement levels across student populations are then used by educators, school boards, and government stakeholders as indicators that the school system is doing all that it can do to support the needs of learners. Over time, such practices become what Latour (2005) refers to as “matters of fact”, settled facts of practice, enacted with no interrogation about how and why they were originally constructed and how they produce certain stories or enactments of achievement while excluding others.

Significant tensions exist between the intent of the Framework, what the Framework explicitly states, and the Framework’s ongoing enactment given the history and legacy of a Eurocentric education system (Anuik & Kearns, 2014; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Cherubini, 2010; Cherubini et al., 2010; Butler, 2015; Kearns & Anuik, 2015). My review of critical and interpretive analyses concerning the Framework leads me to wonder how educators describe their relationship and, by extension, their work within the parameters of the FNMI Policy Framework. I also want to know whether discourses around Aboriginal educational achievement across school boards diverges from what has been stated within the Framework. Conducting a critical narrative inquiry study that is informed by the sensibilities of actor-network theory offers the resources required to interrupt current understandings of achievement as espoused within the

Framework, providing an aerial perspective of the entangled human and non-human “things” that influence the ways in which Aboriginal educational outcomes are storied, responded to, negotiated, and performed. Drawing on Latour (2005), the concept of a “thing” includes an actor (human or non-human) that modifies “a state of affairs by making a difference” (p. 71). This notion of material objects participating in courses of action will be returned to and expanded upon throughout my research.

### **Research Questions**

While there exists a substantial amount of research describing the conditions that contribute to and/or compromise Indigenous students opportunities for accessing equitable education opportunities (Battiste, 2013; Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009; Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002; Dion, 2010; Donald, 2009; Goodard & Foster, 2002; Gordon & White, 2014; Little Bear, 2000; Preston & Claypool, 2013), there is little literature that addresses how things act together with other things and forces to influence how educational stakeholders come to understand achievement and success in particular ways within the context of Aboriginal Education in Ontario. The OME proposes that the Framework is a policy directive encouraging students, support staff, teachers, and administrators to broaden their understanding and incorporation of cultural issues. Yet, from my personal and professional experiences and from reviewing the relevant literature, there are numerous social (symbols and cultural discourses), material (forms and checklists; technologies; buildings; text books; student record systems), and operational challenges (funding restraints; communication practices; metrics; geography) that influence and contradict how such policy directives are storied and enacted. While I acknowledge the Framework is a strong actor, influencing how educators, school boards and government stakeholders perform particular roles, I argue it is only one of many actors at

play in responding to the “problem” of Aboriginal student achievement and engagement in Ontario. This leads me to asking the following research questions:

- In what ways are the strategies, activities, and outcomes outlined within the FNMI Policy Framework and subsequent progress reports responding to the provincial government’s goals of improving Aboriginal student achievement and engagement?
- How are these strategies, activities, and outcomes storied, negotiated and enacted by educators?
- How might a critical examination of the narratives surrounding achievement contribute to increasing the capacity of educators, school boards, and government officials to respond to the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students?

These questions were addressed through a critical narrative research study that foregrounds the policy actors involved in the implementation of the Framework. Recruitment of research participants took place across both public and Catholic school boards in Ontario. Qualitative narrative methods were employed to collect data from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education leads and school board administrators who are or were previously involved in initiatives aimed at meeting the primary objectives outlined in the Framework.

Drawing on the sensibilities of actor network theory (ANT), I sought to better understand how the work of participants has been informed and influenced by the Framework since the policy’s inception in 2007. The analysis stage of this inquiry was an iterative, ongoing process in which I moved away from a focus on only the individual practitioner to include exploration into the range of social and material forces that influence how individuals story, negotiate and enact the Framework. By utilizing a sociomaterial lens, I sought to make visible what I had come to see and understand about how all things—human and non-human, knowledge and systems—act

together with other types of things and forces to generate, dismiss, regulate, and invite activity within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario.

### **Purpose and Significance of the Study**

This qualitative research study explores the meaning(s) Aboriginal education leads and school board administrators give to the Framework and how these meaning(s) are then storied and enacted to produce particular processes, outcomes, and effects within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. I sought to interrogate existing discourses around educational achievement to demonstrate how knowledge and learning is generated through the process and effects of social and material forces coming together in ways that may challenge the intended objectives of the Framework.

A growing number of studies and reports conducted over the past 40 years, (Bains, 2014; Battiste, 2002; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002; Dion, 2010; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015) have indicated the urgent need for governments to focus their efforts on improving educational outcomes among Indigenous students. The scholars responsible for these studies and reports have worked tirelessly to strengthen individuals' understandings around what academic achievement means for Indigenous peoples. Despite these advancements, the promotion and implementation of Indigenous education, in a manner that is both respectful and contributing to a decolonizing agenda, remains a relatively new experience across most Canadian educational contexts (Fitznor, 2005). Nevertheless, as Blimkie, Vetter, and Haig Brown (2014) state, "Understanding Canada's contemporary and historical relations with Aboriginal people is fundamental to developing respectful relations which we believe will contribute to enhancing well-being and academic success for all students" (p. 62).

By all accounts, the Framework was introduced to support the development and implementation of initiatives dedicated to increasing the capacity of the education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of Aboriginal students. Much like the number of research reports before it, the strategies and activities outlined in the Framework proposed to address the achievement gap between Indigenous learners and the rest of Canada.

Unsurprisingly, the issues that impeded Indigenous student achievement 40 years ago continue to persist. The only difference between what was stated 40 years ago and the current message being relayed is the growing intensification around how educational stakeholders talk about achievement.

The current discourses surrounding the achievement of Indigenous learners reflects a broader generalized anxiety about not measuring up. No one denies that the dominant and standardized ways in which knowledge is currently measured portrays a significant achievement gap between the educational outcomes of Indigenous learners and non-Indigenous Canadians. However, when so much emphasis is placed on measuring and comparing diverse and distinct groups against one another, thereby spawning more training, policies, and identification of seemingly universal and neutral best practices aimed at fixing the individual, the prevailing notions of what is supposedly best for individuals instead becomes a lens through which to determine the dignity and worth of others.

What the government and school boards fail to realize is how particular best practices used to support educational achievement are not helpful to particular students or groups, such as individuals who self-identify as Indigenous. Blame for poor achievement then shifts to individual students or their teachers, and away from the education system as a whole despite the system's responsibility to create equitable educational conditions for Aboriginal students (Hewitt, 2000).

In turn, these narratives of achievement become further engrained in policies, perceptions, and processes addressing Indigenous education. Attention is refocused on the students who are perceived as not measuring up, rather than attending to a system that does not measure up.

Other scholars have argued that Indigenous peoples academic achievement is situated within a complex mix of social, political, historical, and cultural issues, all of which are compounded by the legacy of colonization that continues to influence the present day realities of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The devastation produced through the ongoing effects of colonization exhibits itself differently—socially, economically, politically, environmentally, and materially from one community to the next. If colonization, as Smith (2012) describes, plays out in systems of power and domination, then researchers must also attend to unravelling the systemic things that contribute to upholding the formation and stabilization of these systems.

Interrogating how current understandings of Indigenous student achievement are constructed and embedded in educational policy is one way to begin this process. Current conceptualizations of the achievement problem neglect to capture the full scope of factors at play: how social and material elements and forces penetrate one another - acting together - to bring forth what appear to be beneficial enactments of educational achievement for Indigenous learners. Therefore, the purpose of my study is to make visible the processes of how these constructions become legitimated and eventually normalized into the educational system through policies such as the Framework. Taking a sociomaterial approach to the research problem enables me to better understand the experiences of my participants as they enact a policy that itself is underpinned by an assemblage of materials, ideas, histories, artefacts, and images, all brought together and linked to perform a particular function. Expanding the dominant narrative of Indigenous student achievement by tracing how both human and non-human elements, invites,

regulates, and constrains particular forms of activity within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario, contributes to the creation of a decolonizing, transformative space. A sociomaterial lens brings to light how different forms of knowledge and discourses around achievement are produced, preserved, and represented within current educational enactments of educational policy. The research questions posed in the previous section served as my compass in this exploratory study whereby I paid close attention to how the Framework was enacted through the stories shared by my participants to better understand how they negotiated the complexities of policy enactment professionally, emotionally, and materially.

### **Dissertation Overview**

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. In Chapter One, I situated myself directly in the research, explaining how my personal and professional experiences have led me to explore the research problem in its current educational context. In Chapter Two, I will examine scholarly literature pertaining to my research problem. Mapping the relevant literature (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986; 1987; Battiste, 1998; 2002; 2013; RCAP, 1996) enabled me to identify what has been previously studied about my particular area of research and will allow me to further develop my argument for how my study contributes to the broader conversation taking place within the context of Indigenous education in Canada, and more specifically, how it informs Aboriginal education reform in Ontario. In Chapter Three, I situate my research conceptually in the area of ANT. In Chapter Four, I outline an overview of the research design, including the methodological approach critical narrative, methods, sources of data, approach to data analysis, and discussion of the ethical issues that arose. Chapter Five presents the results, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of my study findings. Finally, in Chapter Six, the discussion, I explain how the theoretical and methodological tools I used in my study have informed my conclusions in relation to the research questions. I also address the strengths and limitations of the study.



After elaborating on the prominent findings that emerged from my analysis, I consider the implications in terms of how this research can be utilized by educators, school boards, and government stakeholders.

### **Terminology Choices**

Kovach (2005) states how “the language that we use shapes the way we think” (p. 25). Having worked within an Indigenous education context for some time, I have become cognizant to the changing status of many terms used by Indigenous peoples to identify themselves. In a field wrought with complexity, understanding the usage and historical perspective of certain terms can be a challenging task, but nonetheless an essential one to recognizing the impact such concepts can have on the day-to-day experiences of Indigenous peoples.

According to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (2015), **Aboriginal peoples** is a “collective name for the original peoples of North America and their descendants” (Aboriginal peoples and communities section, para. 1). The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal peoples: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The OME uses the term Aboriginal throughout the Framework to refer to First Nation, Métis, and/or Inuit students. As a means of maintaining consistency in language, I use the term Aboriginal when making reference specifically to the Framework and education initiatives supported by the OME and the province of Ontario. However, it should be noted that an ongoing debate continues around the identification of specific labels such as Aboriginal, FNMI, Indian, Native, or Indigenous as a way of identifying many diverse communities, language groups, and nations. Smith (2012) describes how such terms appear to “collectivize many distinct populations whose experiences under imperialism have been vastly different” (p. 6). It is important to remain sensitive to how each of these terms may be defined and used within and between different groups, or in reference to different contexts. For the purposes of my study, I have chosen to use the term **Indigenous peoples** as it has been used prominently by

some Indigenous scholars and Indigenous rights movements to describe the experiences, issues, and challenges of Indigenous peoples in the international arena. I recognize however, that there is no single term that can be used to describe all Indigenous peoples. Rather, I have aimed to be transparent in my usage of certain words and have tried to remain consistent in my usage throughout the remaining chapters.

I define **colonization** as the notion that one class or group of people, usually those who occupy positions of power and control, see it as their right to make decisions for others; those with power make the assumption that their decisions are correct and acceptable (Yazzie, 2009). Youngblood Henderson (2009) makes reference to the fact that “among colonized peoples, the cognitive legacy of colonization is labeled ‘Eurocentrism’ ” (p. 58). **Eurocentrism** then, can be defined as “a dominant intellectual and educational movement that postulates the superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans...it includes a set of assumptions and beliefs about empirical reality...these assumptions and beliefs [are accepted] as true, as propositions supported by ‘the facts’ ” (p. 58).

Lastly, I define the term **Indigenous/Traditional knowledge** as an extensive and valuable knowledge system,

Covering both what can be observed and what can be thought...Indigenous knowledge thus embodies a web of relationships within a specific ecological context; contains linguistic categories, rules, and relationships unique to each knowledge system; has localized content and meaning; has established customs with respect to acquiring and sharing of knowledge...and implies responsibilities for possessing various kind of knowledge.

(Battiste, 2005, n.p.)

These terms will be referenced throughout the dissertation.

## **Chapter Two: A Review of the Literature**

On both a provincial and a national scale, Indigenous education has been identified as requiring significant reform in order to eliminate the gaps in academic achievement and graduation rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across Canada. Significant challenges continue to undermine educational efforts for Canada's fastest growing population (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986; Battiste, 1998; 2009; 2013; Ireland, 2009). Various factors represent complexities at play throughout discussions concerning Indigenous education nationwide; such factors include a history of colonial policies, the legacy and intergenerational impact of the residential school system, high rates of poverty, chronic underfunding, decaying infrastructure, shortages of qualified/knowledgeable Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, community disconnectedness, and a curriculum that is culturally irrelevant. In this chapter, I identify some of the historical and contemporary debates taking place in Indigenous education scholarship broadly, and as they relate specifically to the present educational climate around Aboriginal student achievement and engagement in Ontario. I conclude with a brief discussion about policy enactment and its relationship to my identified research problem.

### **Indigenous Education: Past and Present**

The effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples and their lands has led to a systemic attack on Indigenous social, political, cultural, educational, and health institutions and frameworks (Battiste, 2013; National Aboriginal Health Organization (NAHO), 2008; RCAP, 1996; Smith, 2012). As a result, the Indigenous population in Canada has experienced tremendous injustice and inequality. One of the key areas where injustice and inequality continues to permeate is through the delivery and quality of educational opportunities available to Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2013; Canadian Coalition for the Advancement of Aboriginal Studies, 2002). A brief summary of Indigenous education in Canada lends context to the original

function of education for Indigenous peoples in Canada. The impact European values and lifestyles have had on Indigenous societies is examined to better understand how conflicting beliefs underpin formal education structures, policies, and definitions around what Aboriginal education looks like in the present day.

**A brief overview of Indigenous education in Canada.** The two volumes comprising *Indian Education in Canada* (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986; 1987) provide a thorough overview of education for Indigenous peoples since the arrival of the first Europeans in Canada, articulating in great depth the process of change that education has undergone for Indigenous peoples across Canada. Evidenced within these texts is the perpetual imposition of Western belief systems on Indigenous societies through an assimilationist agenda, and later the pursuit of control of Indigenous education within a movement seeking to afford Indigenous communities greater autonomy and authority over the education of their children. At the root of such turbulent relations between Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada is a fundamental misunderstanding of how the values, beliefs, and customs inherent in Indigenous philosophy differ from those of Western societies (Little Bear, 2000). Greater understanding of the differences in worldviews is a necessary first step in order for educators, administrators, and government officials to adopt new ways of thinking about the conceptualization and implementation of Indigenous educational policy.

Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill (1987) describe the primary function of education as being the socialization of the young into a society. The process of socialization happens through a person's experiences in both informal socialization contexts (interactions with family and peers, for example) as well as through more formal socialization contexts such as the school system. For individuals who locate themselves within an Indigenous worldview, education and

socialization are often seen as the responsibility of the collective and “are achieved through praise, reward, recognition, and renewal ceremonies and by example, experience, and storytelling” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 81). There is a shared belief that all things are animate, interconnected, and that all things bring forth a spirit and knowledge that is grounded in language, place, and relationships (Battiste, 1998; 2002; Leavitt, 1995; Little Bear, 2000).

In contrast, the values of Western societies can be described as “linear and singular, static, and objective.” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 82). Learning from a Western perspective is often synonymous with what typically occurs in formal educational institutions labeled as schools, colleges, or universities, whereby people are grouped by age, regardless of their individual readiness, motivation, or interest (Hewitt, 2000). Furthermore, educational success and achievement are often determined and communicated quantitatively through performance indicators and standardized assessments (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007; Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Little Bear, 2000) that are oriented towards measuring learning deficits between student cohorts.

One problem of colonialism is that it tries to maintain a singular social order or worldview through force, intimidation, and policy. Despite First Nations education being recognized as both an Indigenous and treaty right, as affirmed in the *Constitutional Act*, 1982 and through signed treaties or agreements between FNMI peoples and the federal government of Canada, the effects of colonization continues to reverberate through a long history of assimilative policies and action intended to terminate the cultural, social, economic, and political distinctiveness of Indigenous peoples by absorbing them into mainstream Canadian life and values (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1986, 1987; Battiste, 2013; Ireland, 2009; Milloy, 1999; RCAP, 1996). One prominent example includes the 1876 *Indian Act*, a federal policy that

outlines the federal government's authority in relation to First Nations people and lands reserved for First Nations. This legislative centerpiece of federal policy continues to control nearly every aspect of First Nations life, including the provision of education (First Nations and Indigenous Studies, 2009). The establishment and ongoing effects of the residential school system represent another example of assimilation, forcibly removing Indigenous children from their homes and communities with the intent to educate, assimilate, and integrate Indigenous peoples into European-Canadian society (Milloy, 1999; Regan, 2010; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Following this particularly dark period in Canadian Indigenous history came the establishment of federally-run Indian day schools beginning in the 1950s. Supported by a policy of integration, Indigenous students had to attend public schools, which, again, saw them travelling from their homes on reserve to adjacent public schools. Kirkness (1999) describes the integration approach to education as a way for the government to maintain control over Canada's Indigenous peoples. From the federal government's perspective, the move toward an integrated education approach was a " 'superior assimilative vehicle'; the best hope of giving the Indians an equal chance with other Canadian citizens to improve their lot and to become fully self-respecting, is to educate their children in the same schools with other Canadian children" (Milloy, 1999; p. 196). The diversity of Indigenous cultures throughout Canada were neither respected nor recognized. There was no notable improvement in student achievement, and students often left school struggling with feelings of alienation and a divided sense of identity.

A more galvanizing moment in the history of First Nations education occurred in the late 1960s when the government of Canada, under the leadership of Pierre Trudeau, released the *White Paper* (1969). This document outlined that, in order for the disparities in living conditions

for Indigenous peoples to be improved, they needed to be made full and equal citizens in Canadian society. Suggestions for achieving full equality included the repeal of the *Indian Act*, the elimination of the Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (then referred to as the Department of Indian Affairs), and the removal of all special legal status for First Nations (White & Peters, 2009). The proposed policy led First Nations across the country to respond in opposition to the paper, citing it as another attempt by the Canadian government to relinquish their responsibility to First Nations and promote cultural genocide. This public outcry by First Nations groups eventually led to the release of the National Indian Brotherhood's 1972 paper titled *Indian Control of Indian Education*, which emphasized the importance of "Aboriginal people [re]assuming control of the education of their children – and of their playing a key role as educators in that process" (Paquette & Fallon, 2010). The government conceded and accepted the Brotherhood's paper, marking a successful act of resistance by First Nations people against the federal government's termination legislation (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1987).

**The contemporary landscape of First Nations education in Canada.** Acceptance of *Indian Control of Indian Education* as the national policy statement on First Nations education was recognized in principle by the department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada in 1973; however, at that time, no legal basis existed in the *Indian Act* to transfer educational responsibility to First Nations (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1987; Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009). Changes in some of the administrative control of schools to First Nations communities did eventually occur whereby the federal government transferred educational administrative responsibility to First Nations. However, this transfer of responsibility to individual First Nations was accomplished within existing federal legislation, administrative arrangements, and policies, with the federal government maintaining statutory responsibility for First Nations education

(Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009). Unsurprisingly, there remains some confusion and debate over what Indian Control over Indian education means and how it should be implemented. In 2010, the Assembly of First Nations released the *First Nations control of First Nations education* policy, reasserting their refusal to “sacrifice future generations to the continued inadequacies of federal government and policy and funding” (p. 5). According to the Assembly of First Nations, First Nations control means that “First Nations are able to exercise their inherent right to education by developing their own policies and laws to provide linguistically and culturally appropriate education that meets the individual and collective rights of their learners” (Assembly of First Nation Report, 2014, n.p.). Hampton (1995) and authors such as Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill (1987) would argue that foundationally, First Nations control of education centers on having political, administrative, financial, personnel, and curricular control over education through the deployment of models and methods that are culturally congruent with the educational values and practices of individual First Nations. However, as Hampton (1995) discusses, the difficulty in understanding what First Nations education means at both a theoretical and practical level is due to the fact that historically, both “First Nations” and “education” have almost always been incongruous with one another:

Part of the problem is that Indian education is inherently a bicultural enterprise that has been directed at two sometimes competing and sometimes complementary goals: assimilation and self-determination. The relationship between these goals and the structures of Western education has not been defined. Currently, each Indian-controlled school, project, parent committee, or program adopts, adapts, or invents those methods or techniques that it feels will best serve its children. (p. 8)



Publications such as The National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations (1972) *Indian Control of Indian Education*, Barman, Hébert, and McCaskill's (1986, 1987) *Indian Education in Canada, Volume 1: The Legacy and Volume 2: The Challenge*, the report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People (1996), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008); the *Accord on Indigenous Education* released by the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (2010), the report of the *Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples* (2011), and most recently, the TRC's release of their final report (2015) have been instrumental in bringing to the forefront the legacy of education for Canada's Indigenous peoples. Contributors to the above-mentioned publications advocate for self-determination in Indigenous education. Yet, concerns remain as to whether implementation of First Nations control over First Nations Education are generating the outcomes Indigenous peoples' desire. The current reality of education for many Indigenous students and communities is one where the devaluation of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices continue to manifest. As Paquette and Fallon (2008) explain,

The concept of an 'Aboriginally controlled education system' needs to be understood against the backdrop of attempts by the federal and provincial government to centralize aspects of education policy—notably in the areas of funding and the content of school curriculum...The dream of 'Indian control of Indian education' has proven chimerical and empty for various reasons: lack of initial capacity and an ongoing lack of capacity development, and a lack of vision, commitment, and ethical and professional standards to name but a few. (p. 377)

Similarly, Carr-Stewart & Steeves (2009) argue that the federal government's responsibility to provide educational services to First Nations people has "lacked foresight and focus on continued improvement" (p. 2). They elaborate further on this claim:

Despite the federal government's intent to provide a comparable system of education to that provided by provincial systems for Canadian children, the delivery of First Nations education is a fractured image of the provincial system and does not furthermore build on the Indigenous education practices, culture, and languages of Canada's First peoples.

(p. 2)

Much of the tension that exists around the topic of First Nations education lies in the principle of comparability that is often used to distinguish the two education systems from one other. There is a breadth of research highlighting that the education First Nations students receive on reserve is not comparable to the education programs and services available through provincially-funded school boards. However, the use of the principle of comparability to discuss such inequities is problematic as there is an inherent disconnect as to how and when it should be used in regards to First Nations Education. As the Assembly of First Nations (2012) has outlined, the principle of comparability has been misused by the federal government, leading to the development of educational programs and measurements that focus on how well First Nations students perform in relation to provincial students. Implicit in this use of language is the promotion of integrating First Nations education and by association, its values and beliefs into provincial education systems rather than taking the necessary steps required to understand, value, and adopt the overall First Nation vision for education, as identified in the 1972 publication *Indian Control of Indian Education*, and more recently the release of the 2010 *First Nation control of First Nation education*. Much of these covert tactics are not all that different from the forced assimilation

strategies used during the residential school era. The only difference is how current assimilative practices are positioned—couched between the use of such ambiguous language as transferability, accountability, and performance measurement.

Built and sustained by Eurocentric ways of knowing and Eurocentric perspectives, Canada's educational system's most serious problem "lies not in its failure to liberate the human potential among Indigenous peoples, but rather in its quest to limit their thought to cognitive imperialistic practices" (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 86). Consequently, Indigenous knowledge and worldviews continue to be subordinated by Eurocentrism in schooling environments (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Tensions remain to this day as government officials and Indigenous communities across the country continue to return to the controversial issues of education reform on reserve and the promotion of Indigenous content and ways of knowing across all curricula at all levels of schooling. There are substantial educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations which lead critics to argue that in "forcing assimilation and acculturation to Eurocentric knowledge, modern governments and education systems have displaced Indigenous knowledge" (Cherubini, 2010, p. 12).

Time after time, research and government documents have evidenced concerns over the inadequate and inequitable funding that First Nation students attending school on reserve receive, and the subsequent negative effects this has on First Nations health and well-being, community connectedness, First Nations school infrastructure, and the sustainment of culturally appropriate, self-determined education. (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, 2013). In 2004, the Auditor General of Canada stated that "at existing rates, it would take 28 years for First Nations communities to reach the national average" (Auditor General, 2004, p. 1). More than six years later, the 2011 June Status Report of the Auditor General of

Canada reported that more time may be needed to address this issue as Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada had only begun to draft an action plan in response to the Auditor General’s audit. (Auditor General, 2011). In a study reviewing Indigenous educational attainment from the 1996, 2001, and 2006 Censuses data as well as the 2011 National Household Survey of Canada, Gordon & White (2014) affirmed the Auditor General’s concern over the education gap, stating “At best, the gap has remained at the same level. At worst, it is beginning to increase” (pp. 14-15). Within the province of Ontario, Dion (2010) has reported the increased need for publicly-funded schools and learning environments to continue investing efforts into creating decolonized and indigenized school environments for Aboriginal students across all levels of schooling. Similarly, a 2013 report released by People for Education stated that while addressing the achievement gap between Aboriginal students and the rest of students is important in Ontario, it is not the only gap that needs to be confronted. Attention must be paid to the increasing knowledge and resource gaps facing school boards if the province’s focus on Aboriginal education is to be sustained.

Media coverage of the youth-led human rights movement *Shannen’s Dream* and the 2014 introduction and demise of Bill C-33—*the First Nation Control of First Nation Education Act* have heightened public knowledge of the current inequities affecting First Nations education and the broader vision for establishing and sustaining the continued infusion of Indigenous content and perspectives into school curricula. In the spring of 2016, the federal government, under the leadership of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, announced that they would make substantive financial investments in improving educational outcomes for First Nations children on reserve, with spending totalling \$2.6 billion over five years beginning in 2016-17. These funds would be allocated to improving elementary and secondary education on reserve, providing language and

cultural programming, and supporting First Nations' child welfare agencies that provide culturally appropriate services to youth on reserve (Government of Canada, 2016a). While this commitment of financial support from the federal government is a promising step in changing relations between the government of Canada and Indigenous peoples, time will tell whether progress is made in establishing an appropriate course of action that addresses the educational disparities in a viable, culturally respectful manner.

### **First Nations Band Controlled Schools and Provincially Funded Schools: Key Differences**

The previous section affirms the disruptive impact that colonialism has had on the social, economic, and cultural foundations of Indigenous communities and the education of Indigenous youth. I alluded to the fact that the government of Canada has failed to provide equitable education for First Nation students. Largely, these inequities stem from a history of colonial policies that have prevented Indigenous communities from having full jurisdiction over education. Before I elaborate on the persistence of inequities pervading the educational system for Canada's Indigenous peoples, I want to take a moment to further distinguish between First Nations band controlled schools and the Aboriginal Education strategy deployed in provincially funded-schools in Ontario. While these systems are certainly linked and need elaboration, they are different systems with distinct funding arrangements that have led to dissimilar schooling experiences and educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

Federal authority over matters relating to "Indians, and land reserved for Indians" comes from section 91(24) of the *Constitution Act* 1867- 1982. In addition, section 114 of the *Indian Act* gives the government authority to enter in to agreements with First Nations regarding the provision of education on reserve (Government of Canada, 2016b). For First Nation students who live on reserve and attend school in their home community, elementary and secondary education is the responsibility of the federal government (Indigenous and Northern Affairs

Canada, 2016). Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is the federal government department responsible for providing the financial support required for students who live on reserve and are enrolled in and attending an eligible elementary or secondary education program. Such programs include First Nation-operated schools, or *band-operated schools* on reserve across Canada, provincially-operated schools off reserve, and private schools both on and off reserves. INAC provides funding directly to First Nations and organizations designated by First Nations, such as tribal councils and First Nation education organizations that are then responsible for managing and delivering the education programs and services (INAC, 2016). Band-operated schools are typically under the direction of a local First Nation Education authority, which is comparable to a board of education. Members of the Education Authority are locally elected representatives made up of parents and community members from that First Nation (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1987). It is the responsibility of the Education Authority to hire administrators and teachers, who may or may not self-identify as Indigenous. Similarly, the Education Authority determines the curricula that will be used in these schools and negotiates tuition agreements with local provincially funded school boards when students must leave their First Nation community to continue their education in a provincially funded elementary and/or secondary school. Funding needs are determined by INAC using a national funding formula that accounts for population growth and increasing living costs. The national formula determines the funding allocated to each of the ten INAC regional offices, where it is then distributed to First Nations communities using a regional formula unique to each region (First Nations Education Council, 2009). However, since 1996, the national INAC funding formula has been capped at 2% annually, despite rising costs of living and a growing body of research showing Indigenous peoples as a growing population (Bains, 2014; First Nations Education Council, 2009). Shortfalls

in funding for education on reserve has led to increasing inequities in the delivery of education programs and services comparable to those provided across the provinces (Barman, Hébert, & McCaskill, 1987; First Nations Education Council, 2009). Unlike their provincial counterparts, federally funded schools have no additional funds to support the costs of libraries, technology, extracurricular activities for students, or the development of culturally appropriate curricula (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, 2013; First Nations Education Council, 2009). While an exhaustive overview of the chronic underfunding felt by First Nations across the country is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to highlight such funding disparities because it illuminates the issues band-operated schools continue to face in their attempts to operate and delivery quality community-based schooling experiences to their youth. These issues are situated within a number of procedural and financial restrictions and regulations imposed by the federal government that challenges the notion of what it really means for communities to have localized control of the education programs serving their children.

### **The Intersection of Western and Indigenous Approaches to Education**

The discussion becomes even more convoluted when consideration is given to the allocation of educational funding for Aboriginal educational initiatives within the province of Ontario. For First Nation students who live in First Nation communities but attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools, a tuition agreement between a First Nation or the federal government and a provincial school board covers the cost of education provided by the school board (First Nations Education Council, 2009). For First Nation students who live in the jurisdiction of the school boards and attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools, education funding is provided by the OME under the Grants for Student Needs (GSN). GSN funding provides support for classrooms, schools, specific student related priorities (e.g. improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students), and local board leadership priorities

(Ministry of Education, 2015). Funding for Métis and Inuit students attending provincially funded elementary and secondary schools is also provided by the OME under the GSN (Ministry of Education, 2015). For Aboriginal students who must transition from attending school on reserve to attending provincially funded schools, and/or who attend schools in urban settings, the challenges they face are vast: the privileging and normalization of Eurocentric values and beliefs; lack of Aboriginal cultural knowledge being represented in school curricula and among teachers; not seeing themselves represented in the teaching population; and the clash between teachers' and students' culturally determined instructional approaches (Dion, 2010; Kanu, 2011). School boards also face tremendous challenges in creating opportunities for Aboriginal student learning including the following: difficulty in identifying Aboriginal student populations; delivery of appropriate educational programming when students are dispersed across a variety of schools; a teaching population that lacks the knowledge, understanding, and confidence to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum; and the challenge of engaging with families and communities who may understandably remain distanced from the formal school system due to their own negative schooling experiences (Dion, 2010). In recent years, there has been a push to integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the standardized school curriculum as a means of addressing some of the challenges described above. This approach to integrating Aboriginal people's histories, their experiences, cultures, traditional knowledge, and values differs from the forced assimilation and integration practices of the past. Rather, the integration of Aboriginal perspectives is what Kanu (2011) and others such as Friesen and Friesen (2002) understand as an ongoing process where individuals bring together and negotiate diverse ways of knowing and thinking within the context of their individual lives. Nakata (2002) has coined this space as the *cultural interface* which is:



The intersection of Western and Indigenous domains...the place where we live and learn, the place that conditions our lives, the place that shapes our futures and more to the point the place where we are active agents in our own lives - where we make decisions - our lifeworld. (p. 285)

Such an approach recognizes that for many Indigenous students and their families, daily realities involve the constant negotiation between Indigenous and Western worldviews, and that the two cannot be strictly separated from one another. The next section outlines the various approaches that have traditionally been taken to incorporate Indigenous perspectives into school curricula and processes and the impact such approaches has had on the educational experiences of Aboriginal students.

### **(Non-) integration of Indigenous Cultural Knowledge into Canada Schools**

The overview of Indigenous education in Canada provided earlier, identified the lack of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and cultural knowledge, the perpetuation of forced assimilation practices and colonial policies that negates Indigenous peoples' heritage and knowledge, and the incompatibility between current school structures and Indigenous cultural values and practices as barriers to Indigenous student educational achievement. Within the public school context, educational stakeholders have attempted a variety of ways to respectfully represent Indigenous worldviews into schools. Many education scholars have studied the context of teacher education programs across Canada and their attempts to bring meaningful instruction in Indigenous education to teacher candidates (Blinkie, Vetter, & Haig-Brown, 2014; Cannon, 2012; Cherubini et al., 2010; Dion, 2007; 2009; Finney & Orr, 1995). Others have devoted their attention to articulating the importance of Indigenous education across school curricula, providing educators with strategies needed to support Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners in the classroom (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011; Armstrong, 2013; Bell & Brant, 2014; Dion, 2010; Kanu, 2011;

Leavitt, 1995; Toulouse, 2011; Tupper & Cappello, 2008). The efforts of these scholars have provided educators at all stages in their professional careers with both practical and innovative ways to engage learners. Additionally, their works demonstrate a significant shift in how Indigenous education has recently been taken up across school systems. Regardless, a continued challenge to the integration of Indigenous culture and worldviews into present day school curricula is how public school educators and administrators, mainly non-Indigenous and belonging to Canadian mainstream culture, perceive of the integration of Indigenous perspectives (Kanu, 2005).

One popular approach taken by many educators to include representation of Indigenous peoples in the curriculum is multicultural education. According to Banks & McGee Banks (2010), taking a multicultural approach to education aims to provide all students—regardless of the groups to which they belong, such as those related to gender, ethnicity, race, culture, language, social class, religion or exceptionality—an equal opportunity to learn in school. However, such an approach to educational reform causes some scholars to question the impact that multicultural education has in engaging students in recognizing the complexities of Indigenous cultures. There are few possibilities through this approach to engage in anti-racist and anticolonial discussion and analysis. Rather, groups are positioned against one another in an attempt to secure power and resources (St. Denis, 2011). Discourses of multiculturalism serve to disguise colonialism and racism and works to “distract from the recognition and redress of Indigenous rights” (St. Denis, 2011, p. 308). Indigenous sovereignty is undermined through the discourse and practices of multiculturalism. Subsequently, efforts to provide non-Indigenous peoples with an understanding of the big picture—the context of socioeconomic and cultural oppression that Indigenous people have historically experienced and continue to face through cultural awareness training—can lead non-Indigenous peoples to resent and resist Indigenous

peoples, “encouraging the belief that cultural difference of the Indigenous Other is the problem” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1086). The push to celebrate cultural difference masks the power relations that are at play and in turn, further perpetuates racial privilege and a colonial mindset (Schick & St. Denis, 2005).

According to Dion (2000), references made to “images of tipis, tomahawks, beads, and buckskins by teachers and students reveal a dehumanized thinking about First Nations people and their histories....Such representations reflect an understanding of history that supports the forgetting of past injustices and their implications for the present” (p. 343). Brant Castellano, Davis, and Lahache (2000) echo these concerns, acknowledging how conventional curricula gives “legitimacy to particular versions of history, ways of knowing, and sets of ideas” (p. 252). For Indigenous youth identifying as linguistically and culturally distinct, a culture of deficiency begins to circulate at an early age as significant disparities in academic outcomes for Indigenous youth in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts are made the central focus in government reports and policies. Battiste and Henderson (2000) argue that current education initiatives aim to identify “one best remedy” (p. 92) to support the success of Indigenous students. Unfortunately, Eurocentric approaches to education have been concerned with defining what the “right” knowledge is, not how students have come to know of that knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Littlebear, 2000). As a result, students’ self-worth is determined by what they produce in compliance with societal norms.

Dion (2007) refers to non-Indigenous educators’ resistance to explore the complexities of their relationship with Indigenous peoples as taking the position of “perfect stranger” (p. 330). These are educators who, when asked to identify their approaches to teaching and learning, are quick to identify that their teaching practices are the result of what they have come to know; or

who are hesitant to approach new topics for learning out of fear that they will get it wrong or offend another in the process:

The fear of offending, the fear of introducing controversial subject material, the fear of introducing content that challenges students' understanding of the dominant stories of Canadian history all support the claim for the position of perfect stranger. Dominant stories that position Aboriginal people as, for example, romanticised, mythical, victimised, or militant Other, enable non-Aboriginal people to position themselves as respectful admirer, moral helper, protector of law and order. In classrooms and elsewhere, there is a dialectical relationship between these discursive practices. While dominant discourses structure teachers' and students' engagement with the stories of post-contact history, teachers and students take up these discourses as a way of protecting themselves from having to recognise their own attachment to and implication in knowledge of the history of the relationship between Aboriginal people and Canadians. (p. 331)

For such individuals, the potential for experiencing discomfort is too great to even consider attempting to address difference in their teaching.

Cultural awareness education and training through professional development opportunities is another mechanism through which school boards attempt to strengthen educators' and school administrators' knowledge, understanding, and experiences of Indigenous education. Sadly, as St. Denis (2007) explains, such strategies rarely influence attitudinal change among educational stakeholders. Cultural awareness education does little to disrupt ideologies of racial superiority and inferiority. Although it is often understood in mainstream thinking that the

effects of colonization and racialization can be addressed by affirming and validating the cultural traditions and heritage of Indigenous peoples, these efforts have limitations:

Cultural revitalization encourages misdiagnosis of the problem. It places far too much responsibility on the marginalized and oppressed to change yet again, and once, again, lets those in positions of dominance off the hook to be accountable for ongoing discrimination. (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1085)

Dion (2010) calls on school boards to engage in processes of decolonizing and indigenizing education for all students and staff regardless of whether or not schools have identified Indigenous students. Suggested actions include ensuring the physical and social environment of schools are representative of Indigenous peoples and their contributions; the inclusion of Indigenous content and perspectives across the curriculum; and the initiation of opportunities for parental and community involvement and partnership. Dion states: “Acknowledging and celebrating Aboriginal presence is not the sole responsibility of Aboriginal people. Canadians live in relationship with Aboriginal people and all Canadians have a responsibility to come to know and understand that relationship” (p. 77).

Based on the emergence of resources available to educators, it would appear there is a commitment to creating learning environments that highlight the distinct epistemological values and beliefs of Indigenous students. However, as Kanu (2011) found in her empirical research studies on the integration of Indigenous perspectives into curriculum and pedagogy, there appears to be a gap between what educational resources espouse and the actual implementation of suggested best practices in Indigenous education. As Kanu (2011) details,

Actual implementation is fraught with tensions and challenges ranging from teachers’ lack of confidence in their knowledge about Aboriginal histories, cultural values, and

issues, to concerns over whether Aboriginal students will perceive mainstream teachers' knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives as legitimate and genuine. (p .214)

Additionally, discourses of achievement continue to propagate an assimilationist agenda through the privileging of a multicultural rhetoric and the promotion of mainstream values (Hare, 2011). Current approaches to thinking about and measuring Indigenous student learning are determined within a battlefield of competing ideologies representative of different groups, bodies of knowledge, values, and attitudes. More often than not, what prevails are Eurocentric educational discourses that espouse inclinations that the education gap between Indigenous learners and non-Indigenous students resides in Indigenous students rather than within what Battiste (2013) describes as “the operating assumptions and structures of the Eurocentric system” (p. 33).

Substantive efforts are still required on the part of teacher education programs, educators, administrators, and school boards to ensure Indigenous perspectives are represented and made fluid throughout educational practice and processes. Considerable work remains in finding ways to implement new policies, guidelines, and curricula into the current education system in a way that provides recognition of and respect for traditional education and Indigenous knowledge. As the Accord on Indigenous Education (2010) states, “The time is right for a concerted and cooperative effort that creates transformational education by rejecting the ‘status quo,’ moving beyond ‘closing the gap’ discourse, and contributing to the well-being of Indigenous peoples and their communities” (p. 2). At a national level, the call to infuse Indigenous perspectives into school curricula, the teaching of Indigenous languages in schools, the staffing of schools with a greater representation of Indigenous teachers, administrators and support workers, as well as modifications to other school processes and leadership practices, are all examples of the kinds of efforts taking place to ensure Indigenous education is rooted in the processes and environments

of the formal school system (Kanu, 2011). Provincial governments and school boards have also introduced many initiatives and policies to ensure Indigenous education remains prominent and integrated across all school curricula at all grade levels. Unfortunately, the Eurocentric power structures that shape what counts as knowledge and knowing continues to undermine the small amount of leveraging potential provided by documents such as the Framework. As provinces like Ontario continue their strategic planning to address the achievement gap among Aboriginal students, it is important to interrogate the discourses that have contributed to the overarching narratives circulating around Aboriginal student achievement and infiltrating Indigenous education policy. Better understanding the effects these narratives have on the practices of educators and on Indigenous students' experiences of schooling will serve to expose the "lumps, tangles, and patches" (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011, p. 100) of the policy process, offering openings to promote productive enactments of educational responsibility.

### **Unpacking the Contextual Dimensions of Indigenous Education**

In the words of Maxwell (2005), I have "treated 'the literature' not as an authority to be deferred to, but as a useful but fallible source of ideas about what's going on, and to attempt to see alternative ways of framing the issues" (p. 35). Through this literature review, I have come to realize that so much of what has transpired in Indigenous education across Canada on both a national and provincial level is a result of the "contextual dimensions" (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012, p. 19) that both precedes and emerges from education policy. From my review of the literature, it is evident there is widespread acknowledgement that significant investment is required in order to improve educational attainment among Indigenous students. However, the decision about what form such investment will take has led to ongoing disagreement between government stakeholders and Indigenous communities (Assembly of First Nations, 2012; Gordon & White, 2014).

Much of the reason why there remains no single resolution to the issue of Indigenous student achievement is that education policy enactment is shaped and influenced by a number of actors and circumstances that differ from one local education context to another. As Latour (2005) states, “any given interaction seems to *overflow* with elements which are already in the situation coming from some other *time*, some other *place*, and generated by some other *agency*” (p. 166). Multiple and often competing factors contribute to how and why a policy gets enacted, many of which are not of one’s choosing. Locality, student population, teacher commitments and experiences, policy management in schools, staffing, funding, buildings, infrastructure, levels of support, standardized testing, existing policy initiatives, legal requirements and responsibilities are only some examples of the contextual dimensions that impact how Indigenous education policy directives such as the Framework are interpreted and eventually translated into the practices, processes, concepts, and procedures of what eventually becomes understood as doing Aboriginal education. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) expand on the notion of interpretation and translation below:

Interpretation is about strategy and translation is about tactics but they are also at times closely interwoven and overlapping. They work together to enrol or hail subjects and inscribe discourse into practices...they involve the production of institutional texts, doing training/professional development, changing structures, roles and relationships, and very importantly the identification and allocation of posts of responsibility and allocation of resources. (p. 47)

By choosing to pursue an ANT-informed study, I approached my research problem with the recognition that context is a mediating factor in the policy enactment work being done across schools and boards of education. I used the constructs of ANT as a means of understanding the



materiality of the Framework within the situated and specific professional environments of my participants. What I was most interested in exploring was how my participants negotiated and made sense of their enactment of the Framework. I recognize that one's involvement in policy work can be both a dynamic and difficult process, especially when it comes to enacting an Indigenous education policy, given the history of colonialism that continues to infiltrate the formal education system.

I invited my participants to share their stories of policy enactment so that I might better understand how they (and boards of education) engage with policy within their particular milieu. My participants' experiences were the focal point of my results and analysis sections as their voices helped illuminate for readers how a particular policy such as the Framework traveled through the school system and was constantly assembled and reassembled to generate particular activities, objects, knowledge, discourses, and identities. The next chapter explores how sociomaterial approaches such as ANT can be used to raise important educational questions around the purpose and activities of policy enactment in schools.

### **Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework**

This chapter outlines my epistemological and ontological position and how my philosophical thinking has informed my research inquiry. I will begin by elaborating on my original position as a constructivist and how the philosophical assumptions, questions, and issues surrounding this paradigm have evolved to inform how I have chosen to approach my qualitative research study. I will explain why I chose to pursue an ANT informed study and how I used the sensibilities of ANT to inform my understanding of the research problem I outlined in Chapter One.

#### **Resisting the Confines of a Single Paradigm**

A distinctive feature of qualitative research is the emphasis placed on how social experience is created and given meaning. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research is:

A situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.

(p. 3)

Qualitative researchers are guided by highly abstract principles concerning the researcher's beliefs about ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Denzin and Lincoln (2011) term these beliefs a "paradigm" or "interpretive framework" (p. 13) that serves to shape how the qualitative researcher approaches their research phenomena and the tools they will use to navigate this

terrain. Given the messiness of doing qualitative research, I find it difficult to locate myself within a single paradigm. How I have come to understand, engage with, and view the world has been informed by different philosophical underpinnings at different points throughout this research journey. This will become more evident as the chapter progresses, but for now I think it is important for me to highlight a couple of the predominant philosophical underpinnings that shaped my thinking as I ventured ahead with my own qualitative study. My decision to do an ANT informed study occurs at the intersection of several frames of thought. My hope is that readers will begin to recognize how each of the different philosophical positions I outline below relate to one another, and how my particular integration of ideas from each of these areas of thought provided me with the intellectual and analytical tools I needed to better understand the research problem I outlined earlier.

**In the beginning: My rationale for adopting a constructivist paradigm.** When I began the process of conceptualizing my argument concerning why it is important to critically examine the strategies, activities, and outcomes outlined within the Framework, I found myself identifying within constructivism because, at the time, I viewed the nature of reality and knowledge as constructed, fluid, and multifaceted (Spector-Mersel, 2010). I viewed my individual reality as shaped largely by the ways in which I perceived it, interpreted it, and responded to it. The interpretive processes I relied on to seek understanding and make meaning of the world around me were contextual and subjective. At that particular point in time, I only had my own frame of reference (mainly my experiences teaching in the North) to rely on, and so I saw my pursuit of qualitative studies and engagement with my topical research as an opportunity to extend my understanding further. I began to make sense of the issues concerning Indigenous student achievement in relation to the social, cultural, historical, political, economic,

and cultural values, infrastructures, and practices that I had been socialized within as a student and now as a member of the education profession. I had to return to and reflect upon these personal and professional experiences, as well as the “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & González, 1992) I accumulated and developed from my family and cultural background, as a means to gain insight into how I came to understand educational issues concerning Indigenous peoples in the manner that I did. My immersion in graduate course work, reading literature related to my area of study, and engaging in dialogue with my peers, equally brought forth important meaning-making opportunities. In those first couple of years of my doctoral studies, I came to recognize that the challenges affecting Indigenous student achievement did not occur in isolation but rather against a backdrop of mutual understandings and practices shared by the dominant class (Schwandt, 2000).

This became most evident when I found that there existed multiple perspectives and opinions on Indigenous student achievement and completion rates. I saw the problem going beyond merely identifying Indigenous students as at-risk in comparison to their non-Indigenous counterparts, but requiring an examination of how one’s understandings of and experiences with power, privilege, racism, colonialism, oppression, identity, and control impacts Indigenous students’ experiences of school. Through my engagement with this area of work, I had to consider the historical roots of an education system developed through colonization, combined with more recent challenges to preserve, validate, and revitalize Indigenous values and knowledge. Adopting a constructivist paradigm afforded me the space to explore how certain educational practices are constructed and eventually perpetuated and translated into policy, perceptions, and processes around Indigenous education.

**Many forks in the road: My theoretical journey continues.** The beauty of engaging in intellectual discussion and reflection is that there are always opportunities to critically read and make connections between, or integrate and synthesize, existing work related to your emerging research topic from multiple theoretical and practical contexts. Graduate study has afforded me opportunities to think deeply about how individuals come to interact and identify themselves within particular networks; in many ways, I attribute the expansion of my thinking to theory. Theory can serve as a roadmap, a navigational tool for charting our journey, “to see where we are now, and where we have come from, and to plot a path for where to go from here” (Cairns & Sears, 2010, p. 62). In this regard, I view theoretical thinking as another form of reflective practice. Theories can also work to emancipate us; generating power through their “ability to move us from one position to another—to unstick us” (Weiss, 2009, p. 78).

My theoretical journey over the course of my doctoral studies has taken me many places. I have engaged with the work of critical theorist Paulo Freire as a means to examine how issues of power, culture, and oppression manifest within and perpetuate throughout the structures of society. For Freire (1970) the purpose of education is to empower human beings to transcend the constraints placed on them by race, class, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, age, ability and other axes of social difference. Education serves to emancipate when individuals “develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (pp. 70-71). Freire’s work emphasizes the practice of freedom, whereby people are not independent and unattached to the world, but rather serve in relation to the world.

Building on the work of Freire (1970), I turned to other critical theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCrit) to better recognize and begin

understanding why the multiple layers of oppression and discrimination have and continue to prevail within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. I became familiar with Critical Race Theory (CRT), and its aims to expose, identify, analyze, and transform the larger, systemic, structural conventions and customs that continue to uphold and maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions within society (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Taylor, 2009; Solóranzo & Yosso, 2002). Similarly, the basic tenet of TribalCrit emphasizes that “colonization is endemic to society” (Brayboy, 2006, p. 429). Brayboy problematizes the concepts of culture, knowledge, and power, arguing that they are traditionally defined through the dominant discourse. He offers alternative ways of understanding, stating that drawing on TribalCrit does not necessarily mean a complete dismissal of Western or academic knowledge, but rather an understanding of how to blend academic and cultural knowledge to “achieve successful resistance, and thus survival” (p. 435). TribalCrit supports research for social change and thus advocates for the pursuit of research that directly involves Indigenous communities throughout all phases of the research agenda-setting process.

While a comprehensive overview of these theories is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I feel it is important to highlight these theories as they have greatly contributed to the decisions I have made regarding the design of my research study. Working within the field of Indigenous education, it would be difficult and impertinent for me to move toward identifying new approaches to educational reform and policy enactment without first taking into consideration the historic reasons of how or why Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples have had radically different experiences of education. Yet, I also know that a research study grounded in the tenets of CRT or TribalCrit asks very different research questions than what I have posed here. The questions I have asked are intentionally focused at looking at the inseparability of the

material and the social forces and how these interact within the context of Indigenous education to produce certain practices, beliefs, and stories that then get reified into educational policy. This is not to dismiss the affordances that theories like CRT or TribalCrit can bring to this research study. On the contrary, it is important to acknowledge the colonizing and racial issues that I expect will come out of this work, which I have done in chapters five and six. I see the tenets of both theories as commensurate with the broader discussion around who and what education policy is for. Gillborn (2009) refers to this as the “material consequences of education policy” (p. 58): Who or what is driving education policy? Who wins and who loses as a result of education policy priorities? What are the effects of policy? These questions, which address the priorities, beneficiaries, and outcomes of education policy, are necessary to consider for the purposes of this study. As previous literature has demonstrated, race inequity and racism are inherent features of the educational system, which work through and on policy in ways that infiltrate areas of curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, school funding, how educators’ are governed by their superiors, but also how educators’ in turn govern themselves and the effects this governance can have on students. My research study aims to disrupt the invisible dynamics of how certain strategies, activities, approaches, and outcomes of achievement are regimented into present day policies, practices, and discussions concerning Aboriginal education in Ontario.

At the forefront of this study is my interest in listening to and understanding the policy actors involved in implementing and translating the Framework. In later chapters, I consider how the Framework has informed or attempted to shape Aboriginal education in Ontario. It is for that reason I align with Ozga’s (2000) view of policy as a process versus a product. Ozga maintains that a broad understanding of what counts as educational policy research enables practitioners to be valued as potential makers of policy and not simply “passive receptacles of policy” (p. 7).

Ball, Maguire, & Braun (2012) build on Ozga's (2000) argument by articulating how "policy is done by and done to teachers; they are actors and subjects, subject to and objects of policy. Policy is written onto bodies and produces particular subject positions" (p. 3). I will revisit this notion in later chapters when I elaborate on how my participants negotiated and navigated different roles, actions, and levels of engagement in response to the strategies, activities, and outcomes outlined within the Framework. By focusing specifically on how the Framework has been enacted across different boards of education, it is my intention to capture how policy involves "negotiation, contestation or struggle between different groups who may lie outside the formal machinery of official policy making" (Ozga 2000, p. 2).

The work of Yanow (1996), which is situated within an interpretive paradigm, has also been important to my understanding of the research problem. Yanow describes an interpretive approach to policy analysis as focusing on how individuals both understand their own actions and interactions within organizations and societies, as well as how they come to understand the actions, interactions, and intentions of others. Significant thought is given to the nature of knowledge, the production and dissemination of knowledge, as well as the lens through which one sees the world and makes sense of what is seen. Rather than approach policy analysis with the assumption that the policy or procedure under scrutiny has accurately perceived the problem or issue, an interpretive approach follows a process of inquiry that seeks to ask questions and interrogate the very definition and articulation of the problem or issue (Yanow, 1996). Interpretations are not formed exclusively from a particular policy's intent, implementation, in the text itself, nor from the reader alone, but rather from the interactions these factors have with one another. This is a circular, iterative process, whereby action is constantly being treated as



texts that are read by its readers: government agencies, ministries, departments, organizations and citizens.

From an education perspective, the meaning(s) individuals give to policy affects both the processes and outcomes of an educators' work. While policies may not explicitly tell educators what to do, they can create, narrow, or change how particular goals or outcomes are set and measured. They can also, as Ball (1994) suggests, redistribute voice so that certain voices are privileged and heard despite what others may say or think. Just as ANT seeks to understand the precise role/influence of non-human actors in the course of another actor's action, an interpretive approach to policy analysis aims to grasp an understanding of the many constraints and influences upon institutional practice. Policy alone does not determine or cause particular effects but rather is primarily discursive, affording, influencing, and authorizing certain changes or transformations in our responses and actions. In this study, I sought to understand what the Framework means to the people who are both responsible for implementing it, and additionally, how this policy is being enacted by the people it is intended to serve and support. As Wagenaar (2011) states, "meaning influences people's behavior" (p. 4). Without an in-depth exploration into the meaning(s) that people attribute to particular institutions, policies, social and cultural practices, and the roles and responsibilities of the human and non-human actors involved, it becomes difficult to gauge what assumptions about educational success and achievement are being formed and sustained.

**Constructing achievement.** From my review of interpretive and critical analyses surrounding the Framework's espoused intentions, I knew the research problem I had identified was fraught with convolution constituted by diverse actors across diverse contexts. Here lay a policy that Ontario educational stakeholders had worked to develop and implement, describing

the importance of recognizing and respecting Indigenous cultures and knowledge within schools, all while trying to additionally meet the expectations of an educational system that presses for greater accountability through standards-based methods. As evidenced in the previous chapter, a desire to close the gap in educational attainment between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the Canadian population has been frequently identified by scholars working in Indigenous education. Yet the gap in educational attainment between Indigenous peoples and the rest of the Canadian population continues to grow. This led me to consider how the problem of Indigenous education has been crafted, manipulated, and performed throughout educational policies and pedagogical practices concerning Indigenous student achievement. Constructivist underpinnings had provided me with the theoretical lens I needed to interpret and understand the complexities around Indigenous student achievement in relation to my own experiences. Critical theories such as CRT and TribalCrit prompted me to probe beneath the surface to explore the conflict and tensions of schooling for Indigenous students within the current educational climate. Scholars in educational policy research urged me to recognize what policy can do, how policies exert agency, and that a majority of policy work takes place on the bedrock of larger educational discourses (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). The accumulation of all of these perspectives led me to shift my research foci to encapsulate something much larger: the construct of achievement.

The issue of achievement figures prominently within the Framework, and thus I felt I needed to draw on the sensibilities of ANT in order to interrogate achievement and the effects of this discursive technology in the practices of those who work most closely with the Framework. Drawing on a sociomaterial approach like ANT, the emphasis shifts from what is or what should be to what is happening when subjects and objects act on each other to create what appears are solid, unassailable policies, practices, texts, and tools (Fenwick, 2014b). From an ANT

perspective, enacting achievement is a process of mobilizing social and material resources that create or at least transform identities in educational settings (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). I wondered what other actors were at play in mobilizing the Framework and how they were configured. I also wondered what kind of realities were being produced through these encounters. What happens in these “minute negotiations” is ANT’s business.

### **Actor-network theory (ANT)**

Actor-network theory can be best described as a socio-material approach to understanding how humans and non-humans (referred to as actors) become assembled and enacted into assemblages (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). There is a general principle of symmetry at play, which denotes that all actors, human and non-human, are capable of exerting force in ways that can exclude, invite, and regulate particular forms of action. ANT traces the ways things come together, how actors are performed into being – and how they manage to hold together - in networks that produce certain forms of knowledge (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). The nature of all actors, with respect to what they do and how they do it, depends entirely on the relations in which they are interwoven. These complex, interwoven networks are spread across space and time, linked together through processes of translation that perform a particular function to produce effects (Fenwick, 2010; Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). Within an educational context, effects can include the production of ideas, identities, rules, routines, policies, knowledge, practices, and reforms.

Actor-network theory is originally derived from the social sciences and studies of technology and science, and is largely associated with the works of Bruno Latour (2005) and John Law (1999; 2008). ANT can be best utilized as a method for understanding, telling stories about how relations assemble or don’t (Law, 2008). Researchers utilizing ANT concepts often rely on ethnographic approaches for conducting their research (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk,

2011; Hamilton, 2001). Focused observation of particular events or time periods, systematic note-taking in real-time, video recording of action, collection of documents and artifacts and interviews with participants are all examples of the methods used by researchers to trace the minute details through which particular networks are established, extended, reconfigured, or detached (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011). Often researchers choose to follow a particular device or text that appears to be exercising particular force in transforming practices and beliefs, such as a policy or curriculum document, while others examine a space where various flows appear to converge in ways that order or reorganize whole systems. Given the parameters of a dissertation, I was unable to ethnographically follow all of the “webs” that entangle and make up the policy process concerning the Framework. Rather, I focused my attention on the personal experiences of my human informants as they shared with me their stories of policy enactment and how they negotiated the complexities of policy enactment within their situated environment. With the permission of my participants, I then used their stories to provide readers with an account of the multifaceted nature of policy work. The specific methods I used for my study are elaborated on in the methodology chapter.

ANT focuses on the heterogeneous and relational nature of how networks are created and changed. From this perspective, dualistic distinctions between humans and non-human, big and small, nature and culture, begin to unravel. Any previous notions of the world as a system of stable and fixed structures are challenged. ANT encourages one to recognize how stability is not inherent in materials themselves, but in the configuration of networks that produces durability (Law, 2008). According to Latour (2005), ANT is based on the premise that individuals are never alone in carrying out a particular course of action: “Action is not done under the full control of consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of

many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled” (p. 44). ANT begins from a point of uncertainty about who and what is acting when individuals act. According to Latour (2005), ANT asks:

When we act, who else is acting? How many agents are also present? How come I never do what I want? What makes us do all the same thing at the same time? Why are we all held by forces that are not of our own making? Where do these asymmetries come from and what are they made of? (p. 43).

ANT affords the opportunity to examine the strategic and relational character of actors in an attempt to identify and help explain the multiple and often contradicting networks at play within the world.

Sociomaterial perspectives, such as ANT, offer scholars in educational research an opportunity to look at how policy is enacted (or resisted, undermined, circumvented) when different heterogeneous assemblages come together and connect. Relying solely on constructivist perspectives prevented me from recognizing and validating what Hamilton (2011) describes as the “mess, fluidity, contingency and vitality of everyday social practice” (p. 58). As Latour (2003) writes, “The maker, the creator, the constructor has to share its agency with a sea of actants over which they have neither control nor mastery” (p. 32). For Latour, there is an important difference between constructed and performed. He prefers performance, enactment, and assemblage to avoid the subjectivist connotations of constructivism. He expands on this further in his book *Reassembling the social* when he asks the question “How do we know what the social world is made up of?” (p. 43). The difficulty with constructivist notions concerning the nature of reality and knowledge is that it suggests a reality that can be observed versus enacted (Mol, 1999). What Latour (2005) and others (Fenwick, 2012; Mulcahy, 2012) argue is that

society, culture, policy, education and so on are not in and of themselves social, but rather “manipulated by means of various tools in the course of a delivery of practices” (Mol, 1999, p. 77).

ANT positions itself within a network ontology that treats human and non-human elements as equal contributors to the networks that continually assemble and reassemble to generate particular actions, forms of knowledge, objects, and discursive processes (Fenwick, 2014b; Hamilton, 2011). Treating human and non-human elements as equal is important in the discussion around policy enactment. Rather than imply that there is a dominant agent responsible for the enactment and mobilization of policy from text to action (which is often the case with constructivism), ANT recognizes that multiple stakeholders and associations contribute to policy enactment. Hamilton (2011) expands on the contributions ANT can offer to the work of policy analysts below:

Using ANT we can develop analytical strategies for dealing with competing policy innovations, unstable or ambiguous social projects and the multiple and shifting perspectives of participants within a given policy initiative. ANT is useful for tracing connections between the local and the global, linking disparate contexts, local action with systemic, without assuming a generic layer of social structure. (p. 58)

Drawing on the sensibilities of ANT has enabled me to understand the ontology of the research problem and to think about more than the human. Too much emphasis is placed on individuals’ capacity to act or change the system or on how materials and humans simply combine to produce particular purposes and effects in education. Rather than treat the human and non-human as separate and distinct from one another, sociomaterial approaches explore the entanglements and intricacies of how certain combinations of things come together to produce

particular effects, and how things lose momentum, generate strength or maintain stability, as well as what knowledge is produced, valued, or neglected as a result of certain assemblages (Fenwick & Landri, 2012). Latour (2005) further explains:

It is as if we were saying to the actors: “We won’t try to discipline you, to make you fit into our categories; we will let you deploy your own worlds, and only later will we ask you to explain how you came about settling them.” The tasks of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst. (p. 23)

For the purposes of my research focus, ANT challenges the taken for granted notion of knowledge and demonstrates the ways knowledge and learning is generated through the process and effects of assemblages coming together.

Sociomaterial approaches like ANT serve as a valuable tool for identifying, analyzing, and disrupting certain enactments of achievement within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. ANT provides me with the sensitizing concepts required to make visible the everyday, interlaced dynamics and tensions that influence how policies such as the Framework are understood and enacted. ANT provides a method for me to map out how power is exerted to privilege certain kinds of knowledge while excluding others, and how this in turn produces and informs the texts, identities, objects, and bodies that eventually assemble and become educational practices (Fenwick, 2010).

While I recognize and can appreciate that multiple realities exist and that these realities are in constant flux, leaning into ANT has not been easy for me. It would be unfair of me to write that I have not struggled with this new way of seeing the world and my place within it. Coming originally from a constructivist camp, I have had a hard time decentering myself from the research problem. I previously foregrounded my own perspectives and reflections around

Indigenous student achievement as a means to make visible the biases and assumptions organizing my particular ways of seeing and interacting with the world. However, what I have come to realize is that individuals do not come to know something independent of the specific contexts in which they are constructed. Rather, each person's experiences are performed and situated within the greater social, cultural, material, and historical contexts in which they occur. Therefore, knowing is viewed as a situated, constantly interrupted activity, influenced by innumerable assemblages (some durable than others). These assemblages then infiltrate particular methods and discourses, which in turn influence how individuals communicate and enact their understandings of what it is they have come to know and understand.

My decision to pursue an ANT informed study emerged from a desire to abandon fixed frames of reference of what "should" be concerning Indigenous educational policy. The literature review presented in the previous chapter demonstrates the repeatedly harmful attempts by Western society to legitimate and reformulate certain systems of knowledge with the explicit purpose of assimilating Indigenous peoples into the mainstream. As much as I am embarking on a policy research study, I also seek to engage in a process of research that is creating rather than taking space (Kovach, 2005). It is not my aim to impose a single solution to the achievement gap problem. Nor am I comfortable subsuming my research study as a decolonization project. I appreciate from the works of Smith (2012) and Tuck & Yang (2012) that the possibilities of decolonization require more from me than a symbolic gesturing to decolonize our education system. However, their contributions serve as a reminder that it is time to ask different questions around achievement and accountability and to identify new ways to explore the longstanding problems that exist around broader educational issues.



Throughout this chapter I have made explicit to readers how my theoretical orientation has evolved throughout the conceptualization and design of my research study. Looking back, it was important to reposition myself as a researcher, as I needed to draw on different approaches to sort through and make meaning of the research problem I am attempting to greater understand. In summary, I seek to explore how achievement is assembled as a network of practices, appreciating “the multiple overlapping worlds that may be leashed together as temporary stabilizations in the process” (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011, p. 95). I am interested in how educational policy works on and through individuals in ways that are often invisible but nonetheless lead people to carry out particular courses of action at particular moments in time. Policy from this perspective mediates individuals’ experiences and the identity options available, and in turn can transform or distort how individuals see the educational context they learn and work within. ANT makes reference to how individuals are all held by forces that are not of our own making. ANT has enabled me to look at what/who is acting when individuals act out or perform our daily activities. In this regard, ANT was an appropriate approach to rely on in my research study as it recognizes how stories/networks are layered, conflicted, at times excluded and time-bound. It was important that I not solely examine one isolated person/practice/policy/process without considering how such things are negotiated and assembled in the course of development. ANT provided the tools to disentangle these multiple layers so that I can focus my inquiry on how these multiple layers originate and converge. The next chapter will elaborate on this perspective of understanding as I provide my rationale for choosing to utilize a critical narrative inquiry methodology.

## **Chapter Four: Research Design and Methodology**

My continued interest in pursuing qualitative research has been prompted by a question posed by Alasdair MacIntyre (1981): “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?” (p. 201). As a new teacher working in an Indigenous context, I found myself telling stories that had moments of tension between my Eurocentric ways of knowing and the Indigenous teaching environment I was working within. It has been this intersection that has prompted me to ask the research questions presented earlier. Had I really considered the “kinds” of stories I was telling, their impact, and how they acted with other actors to shape my behaviours, routines, and understandings of my role as a teacher? Did my stories of teaching and living in Northern Ontario serve as counter stories aimed at disrupting the dominant, colonial discourses surrounding the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario, or were they mere re-enactments of the scripts of teaching and learning that I had witnessed and performed throughout my own schooling experiences? It is these questions that have led me to consider how pursuing critical narrative research can serve as a means to further explore the research questions I outlined in Chapter One. In this chapter, I begin by outlining the distinctive nature of narrative inquiry. I then narrow the focus of this chapter to explain why I have chosen to situate my study within the genre of critical narrative research, elaborating on the strengths and challenges of utilizing this methodology within the contexts of my proposed study. I will discuss the ways in which ANT is commensurable with critical narrative research and will provide an overview of the methods for data collection and analysis that I utilized.

### **Narrative Inquiry**

With an emphasis on storytelling, narrative inquiry “revolves around an interest in life experiences by those who live them” (Chase, 2011, p. 421). In contrast to positivist and post-positivist paradigms which aim to predict, capture, and identify regularities to explain reality

from an objective stance, narrative inquiry draws on social constructivist and postmodern paradigms which recognize knowledge and reality as both variable and subjective in nature. Individuals understand themselves and their world through a variety of aesthetic forms and interpretive processes that are subjective and culturally rooted. How one comes to organize themselves and make meaning is through the telling and exchange of stories (Hendry, 2010; Spector-Mersel, 2010). From this perspective, reality is largely invented by narratives. This idea is explained in greater detail by Spector-Mersel:

By telling stories we impart meaning to ourselves and the world and form our personal identities. Through the stories common to the groups we belong to we create our familial, organizational, community, and national identities. Our culture's "grand stories" teach us what "worthy" life is, what we should aspire to and what we should avoid, what is good and what is evil, what is forbidden and what is permitted. (p. 208)

The strength of narrative inquiry is in its invitational quality (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Reading and living vicariously through another's narrative enables us to recognize and connect with the particulars of a given story.

Through narrative, the relationship of researcher and researched focuses on interpretation and the understanding of meaning (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Phillion (2002) describes three essential qualities/methods of a narrative inquiry: *thinking narratively*—seeing experiences as fluid rather than as fixed; *being in the midst of lives*—seeing research as living in the daily experiences of participants; and *making meaning of experience in relationship*—developing understanding in relationship with participants (pp. 537-538). Narrative inquirers seek to understand and highlight the multiple ways of knowing and understanding human experience. As Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) explain, "Narrative inquirers recognize the tentative and variable

nature of knowledge. They accept and value the way in which narrative inquiry allows wondering, tentativeness, and alternative views to exist as part of the research account” (p. 25).

I recognize that the stories my participants are a part of, both consciously and unconsciously, are not what Spector-Mersel (2010) describes as “exclusive creations” (p. 212), but rather are influenced and limited by the contexts in which they are a part of. As Spector-Mersel further explains:

We have a large degree of freedom in “writing” our stories, but this freedom is limited by the contexts in which we tell them, by the “honourable” stories prevailing in our society at a given time and by components of social structure such as age, gender, ethnicity, class, health, marital status and economic situation. (p. 212)

Consequently, the difficulty in portraying the multiple levels at which narrative inquiry ensues occurs while negotiating what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identifies as the multiple “I’s” in narrative inquiry. As both authors argue:

We are, as researchers and teachers, still telling in our practices our ongoing life histories as they are lived, told, relived, and retold. We restory earlier experiences as we reflect on later experiences so the stories and their meaning shift and change over time...The “I” can speak as researcher, teacher, man or woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic, and as theory builder. Yet in living the narrative inquiry process, we are one person. We are also one in the writing. However, in the writing of narrative, it becomes important to sort out whose voice is the dominant one when we write “I”. (p. 9)

The challenge, then, in pursuing narrative inquiry are the ethical considerations around power, authority, and community. Spector-Mersel (2010) emphasizes how the manner in which stories are interpreted is a crucial part of narrative methodology. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) echo

this by stating that the task of narrative inquirers in writing narrative accounts is “to convey a sense of the complexity of all of the ‘I’s’, all of the ways each of us have of knowing” (p. 10).

Writing this I am reminded of the term *bricoleur* that Denzin and Lincoln (2005) use in the first chapter of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. A “maker of quilts” (p. 4), the bricoleur creates, defining and extending their understandings of themselves and their surroundings through a set of representations using a variety of tools, methods, and techniques of representation and interpretation. The narrative inquirer is a kind of bricoleur, interested in how events are understood and organized and why events unfold the way that they do. Yet, as my understanding of the qualities/methods of narrative inquiry grow, I am beginning to recognize how stories are both enabled and constrained by a range of social and material influences and circumstances. Phillion (2002) writes how “narrative inquiry is as much about learning about and using one’s prisons, one’s unexamined biases and assumptions, one’s unacknowledged desires, as it is about learning about and using one’s strengths” (p. 542). Connelly and Clandinin (1990) explain further, “people are both living their stories in words as they reflect upon life and explain themselves to others” (p. 4). The value in doing this kind of research is the opportunity for both the researcher and the participant to increase their awareness, find meaning, and be understood within the context of a relationship. From a sociomaterial perspective, stories provide individuals with a whole new way of thinking about their relationships with others, with matter, with nature and with larger educational discourses.

**Critical narrative research.** Recognizing that my epistemological and ontological position has been informed by different philosophical underpinnings and theoretical traditions, it was important for the purpose of my study that I position myself as pursuing critical narrative research (CNR). CNR

further a multivocal stance that calls in question what has been observed...and expounds interpretations and observations made by various “voices” within the study that include participants, other research theory, and the researcher...This can foster the interrogation of pre-conceptions and taken-for-granted assumptions that shape and affect the researched experienced. It is in this direct interrogation of what has been understood as the dominant “story” or the “grand narrative” that the potential for personal, professional, and societal change and reconceptualization can manifest. As critical narrative researchers deconstruct and challenge dominant narratives, new storylines hopefully begin to emerge. (Iannacci 2007, p. 60)

It is the multivocal stance and commitment to interrogation that draws me to CNR. Within the context of my study, I sought to augment the “voice” of materiality as a means to emphasize the messiness, fluidity, and contingency of policy enactment. This is not to disregard the individual and their lived experiences; on the contrary, it is to be reminiscent to the fact that what individuals do in their everyday practice is bound in materiality (Orlikowski, 2007). The deemed education gap between Indigenous students and the rest of learners did not emerge impetuously. Rather, it has been the continual assembling and reassembling of both visible and less visible sociomaterial elements, over the course of Canadian history that has generated certain effects and enactments of educational achievement and success. Nested within CNR are the principles and analytical tools required to disrupt what has been taken for granted in discussions and discourses

around Indigenous student achievement. CNR affords the methodological space required to interrogate the construct of achievement. It has enabled me to evoke reader consciousness and understanding that policies around student achievement are more than what they espouse; that policy enactment can be a complex, reactive, contradictory, process, situated within the ebb and flow of broader educational discourses. I view CNR as commensurate with sociomaterial approaches like ANT because using both brings a sense of balance to the research inquiry I have pursued. CNR encourages the researcher to pay attention to the human relationships, while ANT reminds the researcher not to ignore the non-human and what they are capable of. The research questions I posed in Chapter One are overarching, large questions intended to purposely encapsulate a bigger picture of Indigenous student achievement and engagement. My intentions are not to provide definitive answers to these questions but rather make visible what I have come to see and understand around how things come together, within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario, and continually assemble and reassemble to produce distinct objects, subjects, and events (Fenwick & Landri, 2012).

Negotiating what and where I should focus energy in conducting my research has been important throughout this inquiry. Engaging in CNR while drawing on the sensibilities of ANT has prompted me to think consciously and critically about the ethical parameters of this study. In choosing to foreground my participants' experiences enacting the Framework, it was necessary for me to consider the following question by Miller (1996): "How far do we go with our research participants in their attempts to be known?" (p. 145). The following section responds to Miller's question by considering the ethical concerns of becoming involved in this kind of research project.

## **Ethical Considerations**

Given that narrative inquiry, and I would argue qualitative research more broadly, is a relational process seeking to understand, discover, and find meaning, it is both valuable and essential that I consider the moral, social, political, cultural, and material implications for pursuing this area of research. This requires me to develop an ethical attitude (Josselson, 2007). Guided by the question “Is this research necessary to improve people’s lives?” (Bold, 2012, p. 58), CNR affords opportunities for critical reflection and thoughtful self-awareness of the dynamics between myself and the people and policies I seek to better understand.

Reflecting on my research interests and position as a non-Indigenous researcher, I often asked myself the following question: How do I influence the research process? The legacy of education for Canada’s Indigenous peoples has been largely influenced by such high degrees of destruction and reorganization that making meaning requires one to have both depth and breadth in their understanding of the historical and contemporary challenges affecting Indigenous peoples. Pursuing research in the area of Indigenous education, I was cognizant of the implicit and explicit effects of power that have historically influenced the practices of research, and unfortunately, continue to define current approaches to research and instruments used to collect data. In her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Smith (2012) elaborates on what counts as Western research (and inadvertently, what does not count as legitimate knowledge), arguing that “imperialism and colonialism are the specific formations through which the West came to ‘see’, to ‘name’ and to ‘know’ indigenous communities” (p. 60). Smith explains how the pervasive discourse of surveillance has shaped Western and Indigenous knowledges. The exploitation experienced by Indigenous peoples—be it through economic expansion of European settlers, the promotion of new ideologies, and ongoing demonstrations of colonialism—continues to position Indigenous peoples and their worldviews as inferior. Being under surveillance influences how



individuals navigate the spaces and places one assumes, normalizing what constitutes appropriate or acceptable behavior, language, and approaches to research. According to Smith, “taken as a whole system, these ideas determine the wider rules of practice which ensure that Western interests remain dominant” (p. 47).

As much as narrative research makes possible the synthesis of personal experience and the communication of that experience to others, there is also the threat of miscommunication and misrepresentation. This raises questions of legitimation and has led me to consider my position in making statements of others. These concerns are amplified further when ANT sensibilities are paired with narrative research. In pursuing an ANT informed study that utilizes a network conception to make sense of the sociomaterial enmeshed in the policies, practices, and processes concerning the topic of Indigenous student achievement, I must be explicit about how my position as a researcher can unintentionally cause me to privilege some sociomaterial relations while rendering invisible others (Fenwick, Edwards, Sawchuk, 2011). Attending to ethical issues becomes imperative when conducting cross-cultural research involving and concerning Indigenous peoples. As a researcher, I have an important role to ensure my research addresses issues of real concern for Indigenous community members. It is essential that the research I am involved with maximizes the potential of beneficial outcomes for Indigenous communities and contrasts the misguided and harmful research conducted in the past (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2010). Relying on spoken, written, physical, and visual texts (Keats, 2009) to explore the various ways educators navigate the highly complex and political educational terrain they work within enabled both participants and myself

to recognize how both the social and the material assembles to generate particular effects and enactments of the Framework.

### **Methods for Data Collection**

My research study explored how educators and administrators understand and perform through their professional practice the metanarratives of achievement being told, enacted, and embodied through educational policy and practices, within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. By pursuing this study, it was my intention to make visible how these metanarratives may be contributing to, shaping, or inhibiting the capacity for educational stakeholders to respond to the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students within the province of Ontario.

**Recruitment.** The first phase of participant recruitment focused on enrolling participants who were currently working or had previously worked in positions within a provincially funded school board in Ontario. In their professional roles, participants were responsible for providing appropriate services and supports to FNMI students and raising classroom educators' cultural competency through appropriate training and professional development. Due to their prior positions in coaching or consulting roles and/or their extensive experience as a classroom practitioner, these individuals had likely been/were assigned by their school board to work in this leadership role due to their expertise and knowledge of Indigenous perspectives, values and cultures. Participants in this group currently worked or had previously been designated as the Aboriginal education lead for their school board. Individuals designated to these roles have been selected to fill these positions to achieve specific outcomes as outlined in the 2007 FNMI Policy Framework. I purposefully targeted this particular population for two reasons: First, returning to the research questions I asked, I wanted to know in what ways the strategies, activities, and outcomes outlined within the Framework and subsequent progress reports are in fact addressing the provincial government's goals of improving Aboriginal student achievement and

engagement. Second, how are these goals being enacted and translated by individuals working in positions that were developed as a result of such goals being established? Does the discourse around Aboriginal education in schools diverge from what has been published in government documents? If so, what impact does this have on the individuals responsible for fulfilling Ministry mandates that carry with them the legacy of historical and contemporary trauma and mistrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples? How do these individuals define their relationship and by extension, their work within the parameters of the Framework?

Upon receiving ethical approval from Western University Research Ethics Board, I contacted five public and catholic school boards throughout Ontario to ascertain the requirements for obtaining ethics approval at the school board level. I did not limit myself to contacting school boards within a particular geographic area as I preferred to have participation from school boards that represented and recognized the diverse population and life experiences of FNMI students attending provincial schools in Ontario. Moreover, I felt it would be insightful to see how different school boards were striving to achieve the Framework goals through measures that reflected their local circumstances. I wondered how school boards were cooperating and partnering with FNMI families, communities, and organizations to develop strategies that increased the local capacity of their students and contributed to the education of school board staff, teachers, and administrators. Have school boards developed programs, services, and resources to improve academic achievement and engagement for FNMI students? Do these initiatives reflect Aboriginal ways of learning and cultural perspectives of local FNMI families and communities? Finally, is there increased satisfaction and collaboration among educators and FNMI families, communities, and organizations, with respect to initiatives aimed at improving FNMI student achievement and sense of belonging in provincially funded schools?

While I initially approached five school boards as potential sites for my research, I received ethical approval from four of the five schools boards. I was not given a specific reason as to why I was declined ethical approval from the fifth board other than the fact that they (the board) had decided they would not be participating. Approval to conduct research in four of the five boards was received throughout the winter and early spring of 2015. I then sought to contact potential participants who were currently working as their board's Aboriginal education lead. Potential contacts were made through email (See Appendix A). Email addresses were obtained through a third party at the school board level. Through a process of snowball or chain sampling (Patton, 2002), I also sought to contact individuals who had previously held similar roles within a provincial school board, but who had since moved out of their lead positions to pursue other personal or professional endeavors. My rationale for selecting both current and previous school board employees was largely due to the fact that the Framework has been in existence since 2007 with a mandate to improve achievement among FNMI students and to close the achievement gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by the year 2016. Due to the span of time that has passed since the Framework's inception, I recognized that a number of individuals had played a significant role in improving education outcomes among Ontario's Aboriginal students. Thus, while I started by contacting individuals who hold or have previously held Aboriginal Education lead positions, I soon found that many of these individuals recommended I contact additional sources for information to ensure identification and description of issues of central importance to the purpose of this study. This led me to phase two in my recruitment of participants; in addition to interviewing current and former Aboriginal education leads, I also interviewed individuals who currently held senior administration positions within their school boards. I saw these individuals serving as key informants that may be able to assist me in

understanding what is happening in Aboriginal education within their local communities. In total, 13 participants consented to participation in my study. Of these 13 participants, three currently hold positions as Aboriginal education leads in their respective school boards, and seven identified as former Aboriginal education leads, within a provincial school board, between the years of 2007-2015. Of the remaining three participants, two hold current positions in senior administration, while one currently worked in a coordinating position, which included responsibility for the Aboriginal education portfolio. Specific details concerning both the participants and the research sites are further elaborated on in the next chapter. Participants were informed that participation in the study was voluntary, that information collected would remain confidential, and that they could refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on their employment. If the results of the study are published or presented, participants will be informed by email and pseudonyms will be used. Overall, having a larger sample size, representative of different school boards, as well as individuals who currently hold or have held positions with a dedicated focus on Aboriginal education, ensured I had a purposeful sampling of individuals that would provide information rich data and who could speak to the development and implementation of initiatives driven by the vision and goals of the Framework.

**Data collection.** The primary purpose of my study was to identify and greater understand the processes of how educational achievement becomes embodied through Indigenous educational policy and practices concerning FNMI students, and how these narratives are enacted and translated by the diverse actors involved in policy activity. To study this phenomena, I chose to collect narrative data through qualitative interviewing, artifact elicitation, and anecdotal note-taking.

In the words of Seidman (2013) “I interview because I am interested in other people’s stories” (p. 7). My interest in studying narratives as stories of experience (Squire, 2008) drove me toward interviewing methods because I was interested in understanding the lived experiences of how individuals come to know, accept, interpret, and enact the broader educational discourses or stories being told in and through the Framework. I sought to understand how educators perform, reconstruct, perhaps even challenge these stories through their work. I view narrative as a means for transformation and enlightenment, enabling both the participants and myself opportunities for inquiry, while also serving as a medium for both personal and professional development and reflection (Conle 2000; 2001). Employing interviewing methods provided me the means to make sense of other people’s experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences.

I utilized a semi-structured interview approach where I relied on a set of questions to guide the interview between myself and the interviewees (See Appendix B). According to Patton (2002), using an interview guide allows the interviewer to “explore, probe, and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate the particular subject” (p. 343). Having this kind of flexibility enabled me to ensure the major themes of inquiry were pursued while providing opportunities for my conversation with participants to change course. Keeping in mind that I wanted to learn about individuals’ experiences in all their complexities, I needed to ensure I remained attentive to participants’ emotions, body language, level of engagement, details surrounding particular incidents, and the relations of power between myself and participants. As Riessman (2008) remarks, “Narrative interviewing necessitates following participants down *their* trails” (p. 24).

Interviews took place at participants’ schools or at an alternative location convenient for the participants. Letters of information were provided to participants so that they could make an

informed decision regarding their participation in this research study (See Appendix C). I also provided participants with a copy of the interview guide prior to interviews so that they could have time to thoughtfully reflect on the questions posed during the interview. I audio recorded the interviews using a digital recorder and then uploaded digital recordings to my computer, storing the files in a password protected folder on a password protected computer on Western University's network drive. Audio files were encrypted. Written consent forms and other paper documents have been stored in a locked filing cabinet at Western University. Participants names were removed from interview transcripts and pseudonyms were assigned. Interview transcripts were returned to participants for member checking throughout the spring of 2015. Participants were asked to review and approve transcripts for accuracy and clarification, and were encouraged to include additional information.

In addition to relying on spoken texts in the form of recorded interviews with participants, I also invited participants to share with me any visual, written, and/or physical artifacts that contributed to the telling and expressing of their individual stories in relation to the research questions and purpose of study. Visual artifacts could include drawings, art pieces, photographs, videos and other image-based texts. Examples of written artifacts could include journal entries, letters, emails, books, articles, annual reports, policies and other similar texts that guide the work that they do. Physical artifacts could include a feather, sweet grass, or similar items that represent the value system they hold. By inviting participants to share with me a myriad of texts that are significant or representative of their professional practice, it was my hope to deepen my understanding of how participants, experience, live, and tell about their work both in relation to the Framework and within the particularities of the professional context they are working in. I originally had plans to photograph, with participant permission, any artefacts that

were shared with me for use in the results portion of this study. However, what I found early on in the data collection process was rather than explicitly share certain artefacts with me in person, participants instead made reference to artefacts that were important to their professional experiences, such as alluding to their involvement in writing a funding grant or describing for me an artefact that had been gifted to them following a collaborative endeavour. It is my belief that reliance on multiple texts throughout data collection enabled me to better understand the “complex narratives participants construct about how they are living through experiences” (Keats, 2009, p. 182). Keats position is congruent with the sensibilities of ANT, as ANT is interested in how materials become interlaced in practice and how they work with and on each other to create, redirect, and affect knowledge circulation, learning and action (Fenwick, 2012).

In addition to interviewing participants, I had initially planned to conduct field observations of participants who were currently employed within their school board in an Aboriginal lead position. Relying on the sensibilities of ANT in partnership with CNR, it was important to consider how my participants’ experiences were mediated by the materials and environments they worked within. The focus for ANT is not to describe the participants’ surroundings but to record them for the purposes of showing the uncertain and complex nature of how both human and non-human actors work on and with each other to affect educational practices and processes (Latour, 2005). My intentions were to use observational data as a means to capture the settings my participants worked in and the activities that took place in those settings. I additionally wanted to see how human and non-human actors interacted with one another in ways that might regularly escape the consciousness of the people directly working in the setting. However, when I asked one of my participants whether I could observe her as she participated in activities associated with her role as Aboriginal education lead, my participant



responded that it wouldn't be interesting for me to conduct observations as "I don't work directly with teachers or students very often" (Beth (pseudonym), personal communication, December 10, 2014). I received similar responses from other Aboriginal education leads. Such responses were illuminating from an analytical perspective and caused me to reconsider my original decision to rely on observational methods for this study. Instead, I decided to take anecdotal notes that I recorded in a research journal as a means to take inventory of the location where the interview took place and how both the interviewee and myself spoke and responded throughout the interview. In addition, I noted observations and interpretations about body language and artifacts shared, as well as any thoughts, questions, concerns, or unexpected issues that arose throughout the interview session. I also paid close attention to how my participants described particular responsibilities, outcomes, activities or events related to their respective role and the overall goals outlined in the Framework. In listening to their descriptions, I was most interested in how human and non-human materialities combined to produce particular purposes and particular effects within their specific school board.

My interest in foregrounding the human policy actors relevant to the enactment of the Framework, listening to their stories of what they do, what they say, as well as how they describe what other actors do and/or say in the process of doing policy, enabled me to consider the ways my participants have told their individual stories and how they described their experiences and feelings toward the phenomena under study. Relying on interviewing methods, artifact elicitation, and anecdotal note-taking allowed me to better understand and articulate the specific contexts human and non-human actors are working in and against. The stories shared by participants enabled me to highlight the nuances and tensions involved in the negotiation and enactment of policy. Participants' stories were drawn on to generate a series of vignettes written

for the purpose of providing readers with an aerial view of the complex webs policy directives, such as the Framework, are situated within and against. I will expand on my use of restorying and the purpose for including vignettes as a means to synthesize my research findings in the next chapter.

**Data analysis.** For this study I drew on a narrative approach to analyzing the texts discussed and recorded during data collection. Narrative analysis begins from the perspective of the storyteller, recognizing that the stories themselves are the data. Riley & Hawe (2005) emphasize the holistic nature of narrative analysis, emphasizing the need to focus on the individual telling the story, versus merely identifying a set of themes to describe the phenomena under study. Spector-Mersel (2010) outlines the following principles to guide the researcher in their analysis of narrative texts:

- (1) Adopting a multidimensional and interdisciplinary lens
- (2) Treating the story as the whole unit
- (3) Regard for form and content
- (4) Attention to contexts (p. 214)

Narrative analysis focuses on what Riley and Hawe (2005) refer to as the “in process nature of interpretation” (p. 229). Of interest is how stories are told and the context in which the story has been told. Narrative researchers ask the following questions: For whom was the story constructed and for what purpose? How is it composed? What cultural resources does it draw on or take for granted? What storehouse of cultural plots does it call up? What does the story accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest preferred, alternative or counter narratives (Riessman, 2008)? Utilizing a narrative approach provides researchers the opportunity to look “through language” (Wells, 2011) as a means to inquire into or ask questions about particular life

experiences. For the purposes of my study I was particularly interested in what kinds of narratives and what ways of telling were being privileged, reproduced, ignored or excluded within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. Given the positions my participants hold or have previously held, the analysis stage of this inquiry was an iterative, ongoing process in which I continually enquired into the meaning of different situations, the influence human and non-human actors had on those situations, and how participants made sense of their surroundings. Considering the interpretive nature of narrative analysis, it was important that the analysis process remained visible for participants. As mentioned previously, I ensured participants had an opportunity to review transcriptions of interviews. Participants also had the opportunity to review the series of vignettes I wrote. I wanted to ensure the description of events, analytic commentaries, and evaluative perspectives included in each of the vignettes were representative of participants' experiences. It was important to me that participants be involved in this next step of my research study to ensure I was not speaking for them but with them. Participants were invited to review the vignettes for accuracy and clarification and were encouraged to provide any feedback or analytical insights they may have had. Overall, participants appreciated the opportunity to read and review the vignettes and none of them requested any substantial changes, additions, or deletions to the content of the vignettes beyond those grammatical in nature. A few participants were grateful that these issues were being discussed and shared with a wider audience, noting how utilizing a narrative approach afforded the space to encourage ongoing discussion and reflection. Another participant felt it was interesting and valuable to see the similarity in experiences from one person to another.

Remaining ethically responsible throughout the research process is necessary, given the “multiplicity of narrative meaning” (Smythe & Murray, 2000, p. 333) and the interpretive nature

researchers are working within as they formulate meanings from their participants' stories. The emphasis in narrative inquiry is not placed on merely listening, recording, and gathering participants' stories, but in actively telling the researcher's own story to create new stories. This is what Connelly and Clandinin (1990) identify as "collaborative stories" (p. 12). The writing or telling of the story and its commitment to a particular form, be that paper, film, tape, or canvas, is a "mutually constructed story created out of the lives of both researcher and participant" (p. 12). Fine (1994) identifies issues of representation and voice in qualitative research as "working the hyphen" (p. 131), which she explains as "creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not 'happening between,' within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequence" (p. 135). Kovach (2009) highlights the relational significance of stories and the inseparable relationship between stories and knowing. As Smith and Sparkes (2009) summarize, "we live in, through, and out of narrative" (p. 3). By telling stories we impart meaning to ourselves and the world. Policies also carry with them "an interpretational and representational history" (Ball, 1994, p. 17). How a policy is read, and the context of how it is responded to and enacted, carries with it a relationship shaped by policy intentions, texts, interpretations and reactions, both positive and negative in nature.

In pursuing this inquiry, I recognized that I could not remain outside of the research process. From the research questions posed to the vignettes eventually formulated, my position as the researcher and the phenomena under study were inseparable. There were times when the meanings I incurred were shared among my participants. There were other times when my understandings differed from those of my participants because of our individual experiences. Regardless of the circumstances, knowledge is always context-bound and changing when the

context surrounding that knowledge changes (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Conle (2001) states how narrative is “constructed from two perspectives at once: the ‘then’ perspective and the ‘now’ perspective” (p. 28). Throughout the data collection and analysis process I began to recognize how the memories I had of my experiences as a student, then as a teacher, and now as a researcher were recollections and not exact duplications of the original experience (Clandinin, 2013). This was important for me to remember. The views I had of my remembered experiences and the meanings I made through this inquiry helped me to consider the stories being told, enacted, and embodied through educational policy relating to the issue of Indigenous student achievement. I continue to unpack the autobiographical parts of this inquiry, looking at who I am in relation to the phenomenon under study.

As this chapter has demonstrated, I approached the task of dismantling current understandings of Indigenous student achievement because I was interested in identifying and furthering my understanding of the variety of constructions that have had historic and present day influence on Indigenous students’ experiences of schooling. The next chapter outlines in greater detail information concerning my participants and the roles played by these different enactors within policy work. I also elaborate on my use of restorying, articulating why I chose to combine this approach with fictional writing and how it provides an interesting contribution to readers understanding of policy enactment. I then present a series of vignettes grounded in the experiences of my participants that serve as an introduction into my data analysis.

## **Chapter Five: Interpretation, Analysis, and Synthesis of Findings**

In this chapter, I begin by providing a detailed overview of the participants involved in my research study. I also outline my rationale for utilizing a restorying technique as a means to share my participants' experiences doing policy work. I then introduce a series of vignettes that are intended to demonstrate the complexities involved in enacting the Framework from the perspective of my participants. The latter half of the chapter focuses on untangling the vignettes to make visible the myriad actors that assemble to generate particular enactments of Indigenous student achievement. I then discuss what outcomes or effects have arisen as a result of these enactments. I approach my analysis by drawing on both narrative analytical tools and the sensibilities of ANT. I seek to demonstrate how materiality is not inherently separate or distinct from the experiences and tensions my participants described and negotiated, but rather continuously acting upon them in ways that bring forth particular forms of knowledge, objects, routines, and identities.

### **Description of Participants**

For my study, I collected both current and previous school board educators' and administrators' accounts of their professional experiences working within the area of Aboriginal education to understand the ways in which their work has been informed and influenced by the Framework since the policy's inception in 2007. While this study was initially conceptualized around the vision, goals, and strategies articulated within the Framework, my focus throughout this chapter is on what force, if any, this policy directive has exerted on how educators and administrators articulate, perform, and understand their professional responsibilities. I also consider how educators and administrators respond to the actions, interactions, and intentions of other human and non-human actors they are working for, with, and alongside within their specific educational communities.

I individually interviewed two men and 11 women for a total of 13 participants. Data collection occurred across four different provincially funded district school boards within Southwestern Ontario. Three were public school boards and one board was Catholic. All of the participating school boards had policies and procedures in place for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification and were able to confirm that they had students within their board who identified as having First Nations (status/non-status), Métis, and/or Inuit ancestry. Due to a commitment to maintaining the anonymity of my participants and the boards they are/were employed with, I will not be providing a detailed breakdown of the number of FNMI students who have self-identified across each of the four school boards enrolled in my study. However, when comparing the total FNMI student population from one board to the next, there was a lot of diversity in FNMI populations. Much of this diversity had to do with the geography, location, and size of the communities each board serves, proximity to First Nation communities, whether there were existing tuition agreements between First Nation communities and school boards, and diversity in population demographics and ancestral background of the families and communities being served within the board. Due to the diversity in FNMI student population across participating school boards, it is not my intention to draw any generalizing conclusions in my presentation of research findings. Rather, I want to signal that the diversity in student populations will be representative in the array of responses shared by study participants and the perspectives they share regarding the overall impact the Framework has had within their respective professional contexts.

Of the 13 participants, three currently held positions as Aboriginal education leads in their respective school boards and seven formerly held the position of Aboriginal education lead within a provincial school board for a period of time between 2007-2015. Two of the seven

former Aboriginal education leads previously worked for school boards not represented in this study. All of the Aboriginal education leads (both current and former) identified as female. Of this group, four identified as First Nations, two identified as Métis and the remaining four participants identified as non-Aboriginal. What follows is a brief description of participants' professional experiences and how they found themselves involved in the field of Aboriginal education. To maintain confidentiality, all names are pseudonyms and other information has been anonymized.

### **Descriptive characteristics of participants.**

“Beth”

Beth began her career in education as a classroom teacher but moved into her current role as Program Coordinator about ten years ago. This role is housed in the Program department as it involves curriculum and professional learning for teachers. She is responsible for organizing professional learning opportunities primarily for secondary teachers but also works with teachers in the intermediate grades because most of the secondary schools within her board follow a 7-12 model; this means that grades seven and eight are incorporated into existing high schools. She has been designated the FNMI portfolio and describes her work in Aboriginal education as a piece of the larger portfolio she is responsible for. Beth has been solely responsible for the FNMI portfolio for a few years. At her board, it is a position that is hired for internally. Previously, she was responsible for secondary Native studies courses, but her responsibilities expanded when Emma, the former Aboriginal education lead, needed to return to the classroom due to the board's increasing student population of English as a Second Language (ESL) International students. Beth identifies as non-Aboriginal and is of European descent.



“Emma”

Emma has been teaching for about 25 years. She began her career teaching on reserve in another province and later moved to a First Nations reserve in northern Ontario before settling in Southwestern Ontario to teach. She has been with her current school board for about 15 years. She currently works as the board’s ESL Coordinator, working at the system level while also providing instruction at the secondary level. Emma was Beth’s predecessor. She was involved in early discussions around the design and development of the Framework and was asked by the school board Director at the time whether she would be the board’s Aboriginal education lead. Emma enthusiastically accepted the role and worked as her board’s Aboriginal education lead from the policy’s inception up until a few years ago when she returned to the classroom. Emma’s ancestral background is Aboriginal. She was raised to think of herself as Native but now self-identifies as a Métis woman, because she feels this is most understandable to the people within her local community.

“Melissa”

Melissa is the current Aboriginal education liaison for her board. She has 10 years of teaching experience working in both private and public education teaching at both the elementary and secondary level. She applied to this position at a time in her career when she was looking for more challenge in her work and was interested in what this job had to offer. Melissa has held this position for just over four years and works closely with her board’s Native Advisory Committee. Melissa self-identifies as Métis and has close familial ties to one of the First Nation communities within her board’s geographical area.

“Karen”

Prior to Melissa accepting the position of Aboriginal education liaison for her board, both Karen and Lucy held the position. Karen held the position for only a brief period of time before moving on to accept a full-time administrative position in a First Nations community. Similarly to Emma, Karen also participated in stakeholder feedback and consultation sessions for the Framework while it was still in draft form. Her understanding of the Framework and what it was meant to do grew from her years of experience working as both a teacher and administrator in a First Nations setting and the strong relationships she established among local First Nations communities and school boards. Karen now works at the governmental level.

“Lucy”

Lucy has been teaching for 15 years. Her teaching career began abroad before settling in Southwestern Ontario. She has been teaching at the secondary level for about 10 years where she teaches English and is the Native Studies lead for her board. Lucy is also heavily involved in extracurricular activities in the area of equity and inclusive education both within her school community and at the board level. Lucy served as her board’s Aboriginal education liaison for two years. Initially, she was in a teacher support role working closely alongside Karen. When Karen stepped down, the board combined both positions into one and Lucy became the Aboriginal education liaison. At that time, the policy had just been released. Lucy identifies as a First Nations woman and like Melissa, has close relationships to one of the First Nation communities within her board’s geographical area.

“Brenda”

Brenda works for the Catholic school board and began her career in education as a classroom teacher at the elementary level. Brenda has been teaching for 28 years and held the

position of Aboriginal education lead for her board for one year. She applied for the position because she found herself drawn to it, connected in some way through individual experiences. Brenda saw this position as an opportunity to learn more about the diverse and complex nature of Aboriginal cultures, worldviews and Aboriginal communities. Following her tenure as Aboriginal education lead, Brenda returned to working at the elementary level. She now works as an administrator. Brenda self-identifies as non-Aboriginal.

“Sandra”

Sandra also works for the Catholic school board and began her career in education as an elementary school teacher. Sandra has been teaching for 11 years. Sandra is Brenda’s successor and held the position of Aboriginal education lead for five months. When the Aboriginal education lead position was posted within her board, Sandra was looking for a different position for both personal and professional reasons. After doing some research around the posted position, Sandra decided to apply as she felt her personal experiences and willingness to learn more about Aboriginal cultures, worldviews and Aboriginal communities made her a good fit for the position. Sandra self-identifies as non-Aboriginal.

“Kelly”

Kelly has been her board’s Aboriginal education lead for close to seven years. She was the first employee of her board to hold a full-time position in Aboriginal education. Kelly holds a Masters of Social Work and although initially doubtful about whether she met the qualifications for this position, she applied anyway with encouragement from friends and community members. Aside from her own personal schooling experiences, accepting this role was her introduction into the education system. Kelly identifies as First Nations.

“Rebecca”

Rebecca is a former Aboriginal education lead who previously worked for a publicly funded school board. She is not an Ontario certified teacher but has an invested interest in Aboriginal education, due in part to the many diverse educational, professional, and personal experiences she has had both in Canada and abroad. Rebecca held the Aboriginal education lead position for about one year before moving on to pursue professional endeavors outside of the provincial education system. Rebecca identifies as settler Canadian with European ancestry.

“Julia”

Julia was finishing up a Master’s degree in Education when she accepted the position of Aboriginal education lead. At the time, the Framework had only been out for a couple of years. The board she was employed with had previously invested some efforts into Aboriginal education initiatives but they were still very much at the beginning stages of their work. Julia held the position of Aboriginal education lead for about two years before moving on to pursue professional endeavors outside public education. Like Rebecca, Julia is also not an Ontario certified classroom teacher. Julia self-identifies as First Nations.

I also interviewed three individuals who currently hold senior administration positions within their school boards. After conducting only a few interviews with Aboriginal education leads, it became apparent to me that Aboriginal education was defined, understood, implemented, and ultimately received by staff and students in unique ways from one board to another. Each participant’s conceptualization of what is Aboriginal education and how it “ought” to be implemented is representative of a variety of circumstantial and experiential factors. It was important, then, that I leave myself open to hearing multiple perspectives on the issue of Aboriginal student achievement and engagement from multiple stakeholders. As the policy

Framework explicitly states, improved achievement among FNMI students, increased capacity of the education system to respond to the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students, and greater opportunities for knowledge sharing and collaboration across educational communities and community partners cannot happen without a clear commitment from all educational stakeholders, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, to invest in this work. Through engagement with these individuals, I furthered my understanding of the multiple processes, negotiations, powers and authorities, organizations, and personalities affecting how the Framework has been designed and implemented across district school boards.

“Gary”

Gary currently holds a position in senior administration at a public school board. Gary had been in education for over 30 years and began his career as a classroom teacher. He later worked as a vice principal and principal in various schools throughout his board before becoming a Superintendent about 14 years ago. Gary has held the FNMI education portfolio for about seven years, since the launch of the Framework. He is responsible for communicating anything related to FNMI education (e.g. initiatives, policies, grants, new curriculum, etc.) to the entire board district. If there are action steps required, such as implementing new curriculum, it is Gary’s responsibility to design the implementation plan and involve the people who are important to ensuring the plan is effectively and appropriately carried out. Gary identifies as non-Aboriginal.

“Christine”

Christine has worked in education for 28 years at both public and Catholic school boards throughout Ontario. She began her career as a classroom teacher and has since worked as a Special Education teacher and a department head; she has also held various administrator roles.

Prior to her appointment as Superintendent of Education, Christine worked for another school board in Southwestern Ontario where her responsibilities included FNMI education. At the time of our interview, Christine had been in her role as Superintendent of Education at a Catholic school board for one year where she is responsible for the Aboriginal education portfolio. Christine identifies as non-Aboriginal.

“Jim”

Jim works closely with Christine as a curriculum coordinator. He too has been in education for 28 years with teaching experience at both the elementary and secondary levels. He entered his current role as curriculum coordinator five years ago where his responsibilities include Aboriginal education. Jim self-identifies as non-Aboriginal. His ancestral background is European. This year, rather than hire an Aboriginal education lead with their annual funding, Jim and Christine, along with Brenda, Sandra and a few others, formed an Aboriginal education committee. Over the past year, they have been meeting regularly and working collaboratively to increase their board’s awareness, understanding, knowledge and appreciation of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

### **Illuminating the Complexities and Confines of Doing Policy Work**

Throughout the interviews, participants discussed the individual impact their work in Aboriginal education has had on their professional and/or cultural experiences and overall understanding of Aboriginal education. They spoke about their board’s vision for Aboriginal education at the time of holding their respective positions; they discussed how, for example, Aboriginal education was/is defined within the context of their boards, what cooperation and partnerships with FNMI families, communities, and organizations did/does look like, how Aboriginal student achievement and engagement was/is being measured, and what the motivating factors are to continue this work. Participants also reflected on their relationship to

the Framework and how their work and professional experiences have been influenced by this policy directive. Participants discussed the challenges and tensions of being involved in this work, both at an operational or systems level but also in terms of the day-to-day challenges specific to their roles. Lastly, I asked participants to describe for me what a board that does Aboriginal education well looks like. We discussed participants' future goals and aspirations for their board but also for Aboriginal education more broadly. What, if anything, did they want to see change or materialize concerning Aboriginal education? These questions, informed by my reliance on CNR and the sensibilities of ANT, were posed as a means to understand and uncover what particular people and materials have assembled and translated to align with the Framework's objectives. It was important to ask questions that illuminated the diverse landscapes each of my participants worked in so as to expose how policy is rooted in a context of interactions between actors. In this study, these actors could include, but are not limited to, the following: the province, school boards, principals, teachers, discourses around achievement, provincial curricula, student self-identification procedures, standardized tests, survey results, staff meetings, grant proposals, technologies, and classrooms.

I recognize the above questions are not easy questions to answer. Formulating a response to any one of the above questions requires personal reflection; it also involves being candid, knowing one's own background, honouring one's history of resistance, and acknowledging one's experiences of or contributions to oppression. However, what I told myself, and what my participants have reminded me of too, is how important it is to give attention to the larger process, to look at the world from a structural perspective - that is, to have an understanding of oneself as a part of a larger group. By recognizing the complexities and limits, actors/organizations, policies, and programs that exist within the wider space one lives and

works, one begins to notice from a birds' eye view the conditions and systems that they are a part of and may be perpetuating or resisting on a tacit level.

**Exploring the complexity of policy work through stories.** What follows are a series of short vignettes that I wrote. They are grounded in the experiences of my participants and aim to generate a deeper understanding for readers about how policy influences the ways educators come to see their work and themselves. I purposely employed the restorying technique of fictional writing to explore the complex ways that educational policy shapes educators' identities and professional practices. I chose to foreground the voices of my participants as I was most interested in the stories they shared about how they negotiated and enacted this policy. I sought to explore how policies such as the Framework create/recreate individual's identities, as educators, as participants in communities of various sorts, and as citizens in a country where there remains large educational inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. These are topics that can be difficult to approach in academic writing because they are so intimately linked to issues of privilege, power, race, and status. They also continue to be highly politicized both in and out of the educational field. The fictional format offers readers a chance to observe these complex issues in all their nuances and invites readers into the text in a non-threatening, thought-provoking way. Leavy (2013) writes,

Fiction can draw us in, giving us access to new yet familiar worlds in which we might meet strangers or through which we might reflect on our own lives. Through the pleasure, and at times the pain of confronting emotionally charged truths, the process of reading fiction can be transformative, as is the process of writing it...Fiction grants us an imaginary entry into what is otherwise inaccessible. The practice of writing and reading fiction allows us to access imaginary or possible worlds, to re-examine the worlds we live



in, and to enter into the psychological processes that motivate people and the social worlds that shape them. (p. 20)

Through a process of restorying (Creswell, 2008), I weaved into the vignettes excerpts from my interviews with participants. Each of the vignettes concentrate on excavating how my participants experienced, enacted, and responded to the policy directives they were confronted with. I utilized the structural and design elements of fictional writing to further illuminate the experiences, thoughts, and emotions of my participants as well as the non-human participants: technologies, student record systems, surveys, and so on that also comprised the professional environments my participants worked within. I created composite characters to narrate the experiences of my participants and to protect their identities. These characters have been given names different from the pseudonyms assigned to my study participants. The interactions and dialogue between characters as well as the internal monologues I have included in some of the vignettes are not representative of one particular participant's point of view or experience, but rather expounds a montage of perspectives, representative of the diversity of interactions my participants witnessed and encountered in their professional lives. I heavily incorporated dialogue (both with others and internal) as a means to illuminate the personalities of individual characters and how they react and relate to others.

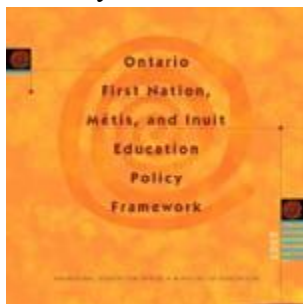
The rich descriptions of places, people, and situations that take place within the vignettes has been developed to draw readers into the narratives. I took the stories of what participants did, what they said, and how they described what others did and said and used that as background to help illuminate some of the negotiations and enactments that can occur when working with policy. Inclusion of these details in fictional writing captures “the physical aspects of the space or situation and the emotional or lived experience of that space or situation” (Leavy, 2013, p.

71). The scenes for each of the vignettes are fictional and have been generated based on descriptions of particular events and circumstances shared by participants. I have included empirical details from my data sources to encourage readers to develop relationships with the characters of these stories. My intention is for the vignettes to serve as case studies for advancing how school boards and educational policymakers think about policy enactment and give rise to important questions for educational policy research.

As readers engage with the following vignettes, I want them to care empathetically for the characters, recognizing the triumphs and challenges involved in the work they do. These stories aim to educate, raise awareness, build critical consciousness, and disrupt the dominant ideologies or stereotypes that can affect how educational stakeholders conceptualize and enact Aboriginal education policy. I will engage in further discussion of emerging themes following the series of vignettes to highlight how policy is a product of multiple interpretations, influences, and agendas, configuring and reconfiguring to yield different effects.

### **Vignette #1: Shifting Priorities**

“Has anyone seen this?” Sheila asks, moving to the next slide of her presentation. She glances



out to the group of teachers sitting in front of her. She notices a lot of heads nodding in response to her question, a couple of blank stares, and a few puzzled expressions. She is not surprised by the array of responses to the picture of the yellow cover up on the screen. In fact,

*Figure 1: The Ontario FNMI Education Policy Framework (2007)*

she has grown to expect such responses. Many educators know such policy exists but do not really know anything about it.

In her almost five years as her board’s Aboriginal education lead, Sheila has used the image of the Framework in a lot of her presentations to contextualize why she is doing the work

she is doing. It gives her work legitimacy. She recognizes that the yellow cover on the screen carries power. The yellow cover shows educators and administrators that there is policy on Aboriginal education and it needs to be made a priority and made explicit in board improvement plans. Otherwise, it becomes too easy to gloss over. No longer can people merely choose to talk about FNMI perspectives only if they want to.

Sheila feels her face grow flush as she recalls a particular instance involving her son. She was helping him study for an upcoming test on the early explorers and the founding nations of Canada. As they were reviewing his notes he pointed out,

“Mom, it is not true that the early explorers discovered Canada. First Nations people were already here.”

Sheila remembers feeling proud of her son’s important observation. She remembers encouraging him to write this on his test. He initially refused but then decided to write the correct answer first and then include his response afterwards. He received a checkmark for the answer that was from the textbook and under where he wrote First Nations people were already here therefore it wasn’t discovered, the teacher wrote, “that is not how I taught it”.

To this day Sheila still feels the blow from this response. The lasting effect of hearing such strong words takes her breath away. Not that she has not heard similar responses muttered during her own educational experiences, but this time the hurt she feels runs deeper because it was directed at her own child. This experience and others reminds her why education is so important, why Aboriginal education, her role within the board is so important. *This is our collective history in Canada*, Sheila thinks to herself. Only when we can get rid of teepees, longhouses, sugar cubed igloos, and dreamcatchers as the only things that people do in their schools to highlight Aboriginal perspectives can we really look at the history and rich learning

opportunities available to our students. The expectations need to be there to have these conversations and not make excuses because someone is uncomfortable with teaching it or afraid they might step on someone's toes. Discomfort and fear should no longer be an excuse.

Of course, she does not say any of this aloud to the group of teachers staring back at her. That would be too much information, too fast. One step at a time, Sheila reminds herself. Right now teachers need to know why this policy is not only important but why it is important to this board. She takes a deep breath and begins, "In 2007, the Ministry of Education identified Aboriginal student success as one of its key priorities..."

### **Vignette #2: The Pendulum Swings**

"There is a significant gap in educational achievement between First Nations people living on reserve and the overall Canadian population. Based on census data from 2001 and 2006, the education gap is widening. The proportion of high school graduates over the age of 15 is 41 percent among First Nations members living on reserves, compared with 77 percent for Canadians as a whole. The 2011 Status Report of the Auditor General of Canada estimates that if steps are not taken to improve the current situation it will take at least 28 years for First Nations communities to reach the national average."

Alexa looks up from her notes and staring back at her is a staff room of educators with their mouths gaping open, shaking their heads in disbelief.

"How can that number be true? That does not make sense. How is that possible?" asks a teacher sitting in the front row.

Alexa pauses before responding to the question posed. She considers for a moment how best to respond, knowing these teachers are intensely listening. She has their attention. Yet, how do you describe, in a one hour informational session, the impacts of such things as forced relocation, racism, the residential school system and the tension these events have left on

relations between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples? How do you inform people in a way that resonates with them? She begins,

“I think it is important to look at this issue from a number of perspectives. Historically, the effects of colonization, the loss of culture, language and traditional knowledges through the residential school system and other policies have wreaked havoc on Aboriginal communities, leaving many communities traumatized and feeling disempowered. Financially, research and government documents show us that students on reserve are systemically underfunded, receiving \$2000-\$3000 less per child in funding than students who attend provincial schools. Unlike provincial schools, schools on reserve receive \$0 for libraries, special education services, computers, software, and teacher training; \$0 for extracurricular activities; \$0 for the development of culturally responsive curricula, Aboriginal language instruction, and pedagogical support. Yet statistically, the Aboriginal population is the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada. In 2011, 1.4 million people identified as Aboriginal, up 20 per cent from 2006. Repeatedly promises are made by government officials to improve the learning conditions for students on reserve but unfortunately these promises often go unfulfilled, the reason always the same—not enough funding. Students begin to grow disheartened and are left working from a disadvantage as a result of these systemic inequities in education.”

Alexa could see in the eyes of her audience that the wheels were turning. She continues, delving deeper in an attempt to personalize the issue, “Think of the school your children attend. If you knew that there was a 28-year gap in educational achievement between your kids and the rest of Canada what would your reaction be?”

“That wouldn't happen,” responds one teacher.

“We would not accept it. I know personally I would pull my kids out of that kind of learning environment,” states another teacher.

Other teachers respond similarly. Alexa grows hopeful, sensing a shift in peoples’ mindsets. Then from the back of the room she can’t help but notice a woman who seems to be growing increasingly disgruntled with the direction the conversation is going. Having reached her tipping point the woman finally stands and exclaims,

“I think I have heard enough. With all due respect Alexa, I cannot help but find your presentation somewhat racist and it is making me uncomfortable. I do not think it is helpful for anyone, especially Indigenous peoples to be dwelling on the past. They need to move on.”

Alexa is taken back by the words that just came out of the woman’s mouth. She also cannot help but notice a hint of defensiveness in the woman’s tone. She wonders if there are other staff members who feel this way but, for whatever reason, don’t vocalize it. Essentially, what this teacher is saying is that Indigenous peoples need to get over it. Although accustomed to hearing such responses, Alexa cannot help but feel dejected. *Where do such comments originate?* she wonders. Are they rooted in fear? Discomfort? Sheer ignorance? Perhaps she assumed too quickly that today’s group was beyond such shallow understandings. Alexa takes a moment to collect her thoughts and compose herself, reminding herself that comments like these make for great teachable moments. Slowly, she begins,

“I can understand you don’t want Indigenous peoples to let the past get in the way and I thank you for sharing your feelings publicly with the rest of the group. When it comes to talking about educational achievement among students who identify as FNMI, it is important to recognize that many students who identify as FNMI face issues and challenges that are comparatively rare among other Canadians but nonetheless impede their educational

achievement. Perhaps I need to take a step back and clarify what I said earlier. What I have been trying to convey throughout today's presentation is that colonization is ongoing and continues to impact students who identify as FNMI because they are learning largely from a westernized perspective that unfortunately continues to largely depict FNMI people as existing only in the past, as part of fiction, as non-human, or as inanimate objects. Overemphasizing European exploration and history; perpetuating stereotypes of FNMI people as violent, aggressive, and uncivilized; putting emphasis on traditional or historical aspects of FNMI people to the exclusion of their contemporary realities; these are all examples of ongoing colonization and it is still happening today. In fact, teaching FNMI content without recognizing and acknowledging the diversity of perspectives between and within cultures, communities, languages, worldviews, organizations, and traditions is colonizing. We have a responsibility to honour the people who lived in this space before any of the rest of us. We have created a bit of a mess in a lot of different ways and we need to do a better job. Starting to do a better job begins with getting to know each other better. We need our kids to be aware of what the historical legacies look like so when their turn comes to lead and make decisions and have influence on how this country is shaped, they will be better informed than the people who came before them."

Alexa looks out to the crowd. She has their attention again. She quickly glances over in the direction of the woman who prompted her to delve into such a passionate speech and notices an empty chair. *Maybe next time*, she thinks to herself. She sees the other teachers growing impatient and knows her hour is up.

"Okay everyone, I think that is all we have time for today. Please complete your session feedback forms before you leave today. If you have any questions or concerns feel free to stay

behind or send me an email. I am here to support you and your classroom in whatever way you need. Thanks everyone.”

As the staff disperses, Alexa collects her handouts and reflects on what just unfolded. She cannot assume educators have the cultural competency they need to both meet curriculum expectations *and* critically engage and examine issues affecting and impacting students who identify as FNMI, their families and communities. Sometimes it feels like the weight of responsibility to ensure her board’s educators are culturally aware falls singlehandedly on her shoulders. Incidents like today signal the need for more cultural competency training not just for teachers but for all board staff. Having facilitated similar sessions within her board, she gets the impression that some of her colleagues have the mindset that FNMI people, by virtue of their cultural and ethnic background, are somehow inferior; that students who identify as FNMI are a problem that needs to be fixed. Alexa is not sure whether there is a real solid understanding among her colleagues that these issues are actually systemic, that there are reasons why educational outcomes for FNMI people are different and they are influenced by a social structure based on separation, hierarchy, and competition. *How do I get across to people that this is not an individual problem but rather a social justice issue?* By not taking responsibility and initiative, you are basically promoting the idea that it is an individual problem. These are the thoughts that Alexa grapples with in doing this work. More recently, she has begun to think critically about her role as her board’s Aboriginal education lead. She knows she has particular deliverables she has to meet by the end of the school year but what are the end goals of this work? What goals are she and the board trying to achieve? Right now, all she knows is that if she wants to make changes within this board, she is going to require a lot of support. She knows too that change is very, very



threatening to the status quo. Implementing policy is very complicated, Alexa decides, as she turns off the staff room lights and walks out the school doors.

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A few days later, Alexa runs into Vanessa at her board's Native Advisory Committee (NAC) meeting, her mind still whirling from the PD session. Alexa is relieved to see Vanessa, and quickly takes a seat beside her, hoping she will be able to provide her with some perspective and much needed guidance.

ALEXA: Am I ever happy to see you! How are you?

VANESSA: Alexa! Hi! Here, I picked you up a coffee on my way here. Double cream, no sugar, right? I am doing well...busy, but that's not anything new. How have you been?

ALEXA: Thanks for this, [taking a sip from her coffee]. I could use a pick me up. I have been okay I guess. To be honest though, these last few days, I have been feeling quite unsettled. I facilitated a PD session a few days back at one school, and well, I received a lot of pushback from teachers and support staff who seemed quite misinformed and reluctant to develop their knowledge and skills to work with FNMI students and families. It just seems sometimes that people are not interested. I cannot tell you how many times someone has said to me, "Oh we don't have any self-identified First Nation students in our school," when in fact census data shows there are. Self-identification data has become a form of currency for me. It is only when I go into a school and say your school has 20 self-identified FNMI students that administrators consider doing something. The data becomes evidence, prompting administrators to make FNMI education a priority. I know what I am saying is not anything you have not experienced before. I guess I just feel kind of isolated doing this work. I am not sure who I can turn to about how I am feeling. Alexa pauses for a moment. Sorry to lay all of this on you.

VANESSA: You don't have to apologize, Alexa. I have heard those comments more times than I care to admit. It can be frustrating feeling as though you are constantly having to compel people to work with you and make Aboriginal education a priority. You know that, from the very beginning, I've seen the Framework as a document for all students. It is not just for FNMI students but for every student. I see this policy serving as a bridge connecting our First Nation schools, communities, and partners to the public education system. I think where the lines get blurred is when we talk about implementation. When you read through the pages of the policy, you quickly realize that the Ministry does not want to tell school boards how to do their jobs. They want to inform them through policy on what they need to do, but the implementation piece is up to the boards. This is often where momentum can be lost.

ALEXA: I agree wholeheartedly with you. The Framework has been a great starting point, and has afforded us some very effective reference points, but I can't help but wonder whether the Framework is forcing anyone to do anything. You know what I mean? I know there are reports we have each had to complete, documenting our board's implementation of the Framework's goals, money spent, outcomes achieved, student success, and so on, but how do we know whether our board's response to what the Framework has set out has been effective? How do you know a teacher is teaching what they should in class? How do you know how principals are dealing with families? How do you know anyone is actually using the resources we provide them with? You just don't, right? And even though I can say what I have done, how do I ensure I am having a positive impact, and that the education, resources, and professional development I am promoting are making some kind of difference?

VANESSA: All you can do, Alexa, is share what you know and try to explain to people why things are the way they are with our people. What that whole history is about, which you can't do

in five minutes, but you can at least try to give some of that. You are in a very challenging role. Collaboration across the board is a barrier. I still get a sense that Aboriginal education is in a silo, and nobody has a position quite like yours, which is another challenge of doing this work. If you only have one person like yourself doing everything, then it spreads your energies and resources pretty thin.

ALEXA: You can say that again. You can't do everything and do it justice. This is definitely not a 9-5 kind of job. But you do the best you can, right?

VANESSA: Right. Keep in mind, Aboriginal education is not everyone's interest. I think sometimes people see this as an option to understanding as opposed to it being necessary. There are still people who have never heard of the Framework who look at you like you have two heads because they have never seen it before. You will continue to bump up against resistance and negative attitudes that you will be just disgusted with, but just try to hold on. You have to focus on what you can do and where you can have positive influence.

ALEXA: You are right. So often, people think they get it and they think they know everything they need to know, and then you realize they are so unwilling to change what they consider the right way of doing things. To think outside the box, that does not come easy for a lot of people.

VANESSA: Yes, it isn't easy. The position you are in requires a lot of patience. I want to share with you a little piece of advice that I often share with teachers who ask me, "Vanessa, how do I become successful with my FNMI students? What do I need to know?" One of the first things I tell them is you need to be proud of who you are as a person and as an educator. You need to be proud of your own culture and heritage. You are not only a teacher. You are a person with a rich cultural background and cultural identity, and if you don't acknowledge and honour that within yourself, how are you going to help Aboriginal students feel comfortable sharing their own

culture? Take some time to think about that Alexa. You are doing great work, and I know it isn't always easy, but you have people to reach out to: me, Doug, our NAC group. This is not work you should be doing alone. We all need to work together.

ALEXA: Thanks, Vanessa. I think I needed to hear someone say that. You have given me a lot to think about. Coffee is on me next time, okay?

VANESSA: [laughs] Okay, deal. I think the meeting is just about to start.

### **Vignette #3: Two Worlds Colliding**

Driving to the board office Thursday evening, Janice couldn't help but notice the knot that filled her stomach all day was growing. "Janice you need to relax. The meeting hasn't even begun and you have gotten yourself all worked up into a tizzy," she mutters aloud to herself. Her efforts at giving herself a pep talk flop miserably. She is on her way to a meeting at the board office between the local First Nation communities and the school board trustees and administration. The topic for discussion at tonight's meeting is tuition agreements.

Unbeknownst to many, education for First Nation students who reside in a First Nation community is provided through federal funding. For many First Nation students, their community may only provide education programming up to Grade 6 or Grade 8. This means most students, at some point in their schooling, must leave their communities to continue their education in provincially funded schools. A tuition agreement is established between a First Nation or the federal government and a school board to cover the cost of education provided by the school board. There is no "one size fits all" approach to these agreements. Specific needs addressed in these agreements are unique from community to community. Regular monthly meetings like the one tonight are held to discuss current issues with existing agreements, issues impacting First Nation students, and possible solutions or proposed amendment changes to the agreements. Special education programs and services, First Nation staffing, transportation, and

cultural programming are only a few of the items that may be tabled at a given meeting. Still quite new to her position as her board's Aboriginal education liaison, Janice had heard from others how stressful and uncomfortable these meetings can get. She wonders whether tonight's meeting will run a similar course. She makes sure to arrive early to the meeting so she can introduce herself to community members and make people feel comfortable. As she walks into the board room, she notices no one from the board of education has arrived yet, only First Nation community representatives. Janice notices an older woman sitting at the table, someone she recognizes from a previous board event. The woman looks in Janice's direction and says,

“So whose side are you on?”

The knot in Janice's stomach tightens.

“I am on the students' side,” she responds back.

She tries to move the conversation in a lighter direction but seemingly fails, feeling the tension in the room thicken as the school board trustees and administrators file into the meeting room.

Driving home that night, Janice is caught in a web of thoughts. Echoing through her head is the question,

*Whose side are you on?*

Janice doesn't blame the woman for asking her such a question. The question originates from the colonial and paternalistic relationship between government officials and First Nations carried forward from the treaty making days. As an Indigenous person, she feels frustration being confined to the Framework. Where am I here? I don't see myself here. You are not speaking to me here. It seems the Framework is where those two worlds, ours and theirs, collide. Coming into this position, she viewed education as a shared responsibility. Her experiences up to this

point had reinforced the beauty of diversity and the importance of the collective as opposed to the individual. But since starting to work for the board, it felt like her little bubble had burst. Janice began to see that not everybody shared her attitude toward education being a collective responsibility. In her role, she often feels herself straddling two worlds. She is aware of the tensions that exist between these two worlds. She tries to do the best she can, given her own understanding, to advocate for the needs of Indigenous peoples. Her job is to bridge relationships, not create more of a divide. But there are moments, like at tonight's meeting, when she can't help but feel frustrated, feeling as though the experiences of community members are not always being heard. She has seen it before: organizations touting what they are doing, paying lip service to improving relationships with local First Nation communities but never committing to it in any substantial way. Was tonight's meeting any different? If Janice had learned anything thus far, it was how important it is to do the things we say we should be doing including building stronger relationships with our local First Nation communities and honoring who our students are. Honoring whatever they are, whatever they come to the table with. In a short amount of time, she has grown far more cognizant of the students who feel unsafe at school because of their heritage, who are not having their identities represented in what is being taught at school and how painful that can be.

People with prejudicial attitudes don't want to see Native people in their classes. They don't want to see the public education system honouring Indigenous peoples. Prejudicial attitudes do not serve the interests of our schools. School boards need to be a little more intentional about the work that they do. Janice asks herself: Is the policy important to the work that I do? Yes, but it is only a small part of the puzzle. I can write grant proposals and report on funding two days out of the school year. The real commitment is working with students,

teachers, and administrators, so that everyone has a greater understanding of FNMI perspectives. School boards have to do more to grow the capacity of their staff. School boards have an accountability to their Indigenous partners and to students and their families. We have to at least try to make things better. Our students deserve better.

Janice muffles a yawn, as she unlocks the front door to her home. Her large golden retriever, Barney, greets her at the door, his tail wagging fiercely. She pets the top of his furry head and heads toward the kitchen.

“Let’s get you and me some dinner,” she says aloud. “It has been a long day.”

#### **Vignette #4: When is Good Enough not Enough?**

“Hey Dianne, the results from the school climate surveys have arrived from research and assessment. Do you want me to just leave them on your desk?”

“Oh, hi, Bill, that would be great, thanks” responds Dianne, barely looking up from her computer. She is up to her neck in emails since the cancellation of yesterday’s PD event due to inclement weather. She looks down at her watch. She has a meeting in thirty minutes and another meeting after that she still needs to review her notes for, but she really wants to review the school climate survey results.

Dianne reaches for the envelope Bill left on her desk. The school climate surveys are anonymous surveys that school boards across Ontario are required to administer to students, school staff, and parents, at least once every two years. The purpose of the survey is to assess student, staff, and family perceptions of school safety, determine the effectiveness of each board’s inclusive and equity programming, and guide future planning decisions about programs to help prevent bullying and promote a positive school climate. Dianne has been waiting for the survey results to arrive for quite some time because they help her gauge whether FNMI students

are feeling safe and welcomed in school, and whether they see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and the school community.

Dianne quickly scans the executive summary of the survey results. She flips through the responses received from students, stopping when she reads the response to the following question:

*Do you ever feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at your school because of your Aboriginal background? (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)*

*Student responses indicate that 100% of our students who have FNMI background have felt uncomfortable at their schools as a result of their cultural background at some point in their schooling experiences.*

Wow. This is not good, Dianne thinks to herself. We can't have a group of students in our school of whom 100% don't feel welcomed here because of their heritage.

"Hey, are you ready to go?"

Startled, Dianne looks up from the report to see her colleague and friend Jackie standing in the doorway of her office. She quickly remembers they have a department meeting to attend.

"Is it 1:00 pm already? Just let me grab my notes and a pen." Dianne stuffs the survey results back in its envelope, making a mental note to return to them later this afternoon.

Deciding to take the stairs versus the elevator to their meeting on the third floor, Jackie looks over at Dianne and asks, "You okay, Dianne? You seem a little distracted."

"I am," Dianne admits. "I just had a chance to review the student responses from our board's climate survey."

"And what did the survey results show?" asks Jackie.



“That at some point in their schooling experiences, 100% of our students who have an FNMI background have felt uncomfortable or unwelcome at their schools as a result of their Aboriginal background.” Dianne reveals.

“Ouch. That’s not what you wanted to find out.” Jackie responds.

“I know. To be honest, I can’t say I am all that surprised, but still... I wasn’t expecting to see *those* kind of percentages. Jackie, I don’t know what to think. The Aboriginal education portfolio deserves someone who can dedicate a lot more time to doing the work. I know we have a small population of FNMI students in comparison to other boards, but I still feel a lot more can be done at the student level. I just don’t have the extra time or support. There is an assumption in the Framework that our board has an active community voice and that we have active stakeholders. My stakeholders are a mom from Granger and a teacher from Chitsworth. That’s it. I don’t have a FNMI education advisory committee to turn to because we don’t have any First Nation communities within our board boundaries. I don’t have a ready network of Elders, community members, or even a Friendship Centre I can go to. There is a presumption that there is a ready community that wants to be a part of what we are doing. Perhaps somebody who is First Nations would be better suited for this position.” Dianne concludes.

“Now just hold on, Dianne. You are being too hard on yourself. You have been doing a great job with the Aboriginal education portfolio. Are you saying you feel you are not the right person for the job?” Jackie asks, stopping at the top of the stairs.

“I don’t know,” Dianne says quietly. “It just feels wrong that I am making the decisions. I think somebody who is First Nations, Métis, or Inuit may be better connected to our local community and might have ready access to people who want to be stakeholders that I’m unintentionally excluding. It is certainly something that has crossed my mind. Jackie, I don’t

even know who to ask to come to my meetings! Am I entitled to have a voice related to FNMI perspectives and issues or is that continued colonization? I am not sure. I just feel it honours the concerns and challenges of FNMI communities more if it's somebody who can speak to what it is like to be a First Nation, Métis or Inuit person. I know the policy. I know what I am supposed to be doing, but on the ground level, it is a lot more challenging for me to know which people to go to and how to see the work to completion. I have been doing a lot of reading lately and just trying to get a better perspective and increase my own understanding, but I definitely don't have the knowledge that I need. I worry that I am causing more harm than good. I don't ever want our Superintendent to perceive that I don't like the work, and I don't know whether she will understand my view that we need somebody in this role who is a more natural fit. It will be a courageous conversation to have with her, to say, "Hey you know what, I don't think I am the right person for the job anymore." As a board we have made some good steps in the policy stuff, but the results of the climate survey tell me we still have a long way to go."

"This seems to be something you have been grappling with for a while." Jackie pauses before continuing, "Am I right about this?"

"Yeah, it is," Dianne admits. "Anyway, enough about that right now. We are going to be late for our meeting if we don't get moving."

\*

Returning to her office later that afternoon, Dianne quietly closes the door behind her, takes a seat at her desk, and reaches for the envelope containing the school climate survey results. She pulls the papers out and flips to the page she earmarked earlier. Her eyes focus immediately on the question:

*Do you ever feel unwelcome or uncomfortable at your school because of your Aboriginal background? (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)*

*Student responses indicate that 100% of our students who have FNMI background have felt uncomfortable at their schools as a result of their cultural background at some point in their schooling experiences.*

She leans back in her chair and sighs heavily. Since taking on the role of coordinator of FNMI education, Dianne has put forth her best efforts to reach out to students, parents, guardians and the wider FNMI community in her board. She has sought input and suggestions on the direction of FNMI education in her board and has done her best to honour the voices of students, families, and community members. But despite my best efforts have I done enough? Dianne considers the fundamental work of her position is challenging assumptions, to participate in difficult conversations, and to help others do the same. There are opportunities for her to educate teachers and better inform them about FNMI histories, beliefs, backgrounds. If we educate the teachers, we will have better outcomes for our students, FNMI or non-FNMI. All of our students will know more about our shared heritage and hopefully grow a respect for it, *that essential for some, good for all* kind of attitude. But Dianne can't help but wonder whether her positionality as a non-Indigenous person disqualifies her from having a voice in the discussion of Indigenous education in Ontario. She considers this for a moment. Then, remembering she has one last essay to write for the graduate course she is taking online through the local university, she opens up her laptop. Perhaps she can somehow weave her thoughts and experiences as a coordinator of FNMI education into her final paper. She begins typing:

*I think I do have a voice in the discussion about the direction of Indigenous education in Ontario. My position in the discussion is as an interested and engaged educator, with always more to learn, and other points of view to consider.*

Dianne stops typing for a moment. She can't seem to quiet the little voice in her head that continues to nag at her, challenge her, and cause her to second guess her role in this work. After a couple of moments, she begins typing again:

*I try to keep the mindset that I am here for listening and not as a teller of things that must be done. But I have my doubts, like when I meet with a parent, a community member or event attend Aboriginal education lead meetings. It is a question mark on peoples' faces. Is she FNMI? I know people always want to ask, and I don't really know the politically correct way to address it. I don't know how to respond. I often will just say no I am not First Nations, I am not Métis and I am not Inuit but I am trying to be a good advocate for our FNMI students and their families. I try to answer the question before people really need to ask it, because I think it is uncomfortable for people to ask. Sometimes I like to pretend that maybe they think I am, that I just fit in better than I feel I do.*

Dianne stops typing, her gaze falling on the climate survey results in front of her.

*Student responses indicate that 100% of our students who have FNMI background have felt uncomfortable at their schools as a result of their cultural background at some point in their schooling experiences.*

She stares hard at those words until they are etched into her memory. Dianne can't help but feel caught at times between serving the policy and serving the student. FNMI students aren't going to feel as if they belong if their non-FNMI peers and teachers don't understand their backgrounds or *our* colonial history. Yet with her current professional obligations, she doesn't

have time to teach. More professional development is sorely needed not only for teachers and senior leadership but also the frontline workers—educational assistants, school secretaries, janitorial staff... but right now she is barely able to scratch the surface. “It is not the youth that are the problem, it is the system,” Dianne mumbles aloud to herself. Unfortunately, board budgets don’t allow for the hiring of additional staff to help her with this work. There is just no money for that. So she has to get creative in her approaches to fulfilling the Framework’s goals, but it is really difficult. She often wonders in what ways she may be compromising her own core values in the role she has now. When is good enough not enough?

Dianne starts typing again:

*In my exploration of Indigenous education and my very small role in it, my instincts tell me that what I am doing is important, and that I am not doing harm. However, I am cognizant that others might see it differently. My most important work may be to be a critical thinker: a critical consumer of policy and information.*

Dianne clicks save and shuts down her computer. She feels a lot better having been able to get out her feelings and emotions, not only in response to the climate survey results, but in relation to her role in general. She wonders if other board leads share similar experiences. As she packs up to head home, she takes a quick glance at her calendar and is reminded that there is an Aboriginal education leads meeting next week in Toronto. It will be nice to touch base with the other leads and hear how they navigate the challenges of doing this work.

### **Vignette #5: Coming Back Full Circle**

“Good morning everyone. If you could all take a seat, we will get started in a few minutes,” announces Bev from the front of the conference room.

Slowly, everyone finds their seat, some with coffee or tea in hand, while others take a moment to review the agenda being passed around. Aboriginal education leads from across the

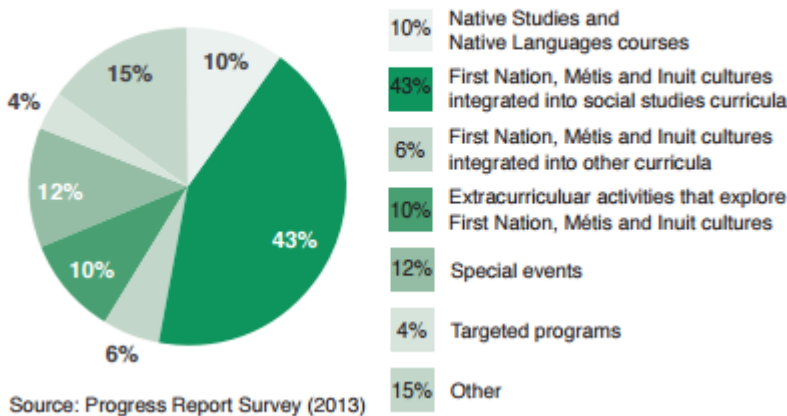
province have gathered together in Toronto for the next couple of days to participate in a series of meetings and presentations and to share their board's progress made to date on the implementation of the Framework. Bev is the Aboriginal education officer for the Southwestern region. She works closely with the Aboriginal education leads within her region to ensure they have appropriate support and information to fulfill the Ministry's two primary objectives—to improve achievement among FNMI students in Ontario and to close the achievement gap between Aboriginal students and all students.

“Okay everyone, I think we are ready to get started. From reviewing today's agenda, you can see there are a number of topics we wish to address, and I want to ensure everyone has an opportunity to share with one another current successful student achievement initiatives that are working within their respective boards. First, however, I want to discuss the results of the 2013 Progress Report Survey. Each of you should have received a summary of the survey results from me via email. In preparation for today's meeting, I asked all of you to review the results so we could brainstorm strategies to support your board's next phase of implementation planning. It is important that every board works to sustain the critical activities established in the first six years of the Framework to support system-wide integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the provincial education system.” Bev pauses for a moment, “Are there any questions so far?” she peers around the room. When no one responds, she continues on,

“So to refresh everyone's memory, the Progress Report Summary was conducted in spring 2013, and administered by the Ministry's Aboriginal Education Office. We invited feedback on Framework implementation from district school boards, educators, students, parents and Aboriginal community organizations across the province. The goal of this survey was to invite feedback on Framework implementation related to each of the 10 performance measures.

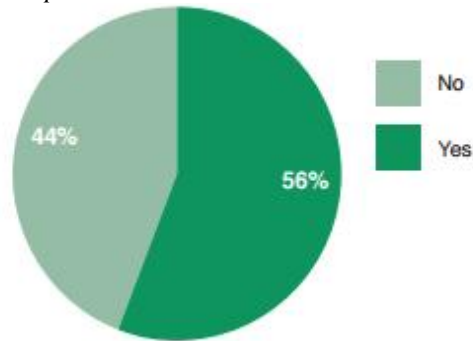
Parents who responded to the survey said that many schools across the province were able to include First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives in the curriculum. I want to draw your attention to Figures 2-5 up on the following slides. These show examples of feedback received from students, parents and guardians, teaching and non-teaching staff, and community organizations.” Bev stops talking to give everyone time to study the first slide:

Figure 2: Parent/Guardian Perceptions of how First Nation, Métis and Inuit Perspectives Are Integrated in the Curriculum



She begins again: “The *Progress Report* survey allowed parents and guardians to comment on their perceptions related to how well First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives are being integrated into the curriculum and what school boards are doing to support knowledge and awareness building. The survey also focused on collecting data with respect to providing educators with targeted professional development and developing resources to help serve First Nation, Métis and Inuit students more effectively.” Bev clicks ahead to the next slide:

*Figure 3: Participation of Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff in Targeted Professional Development*

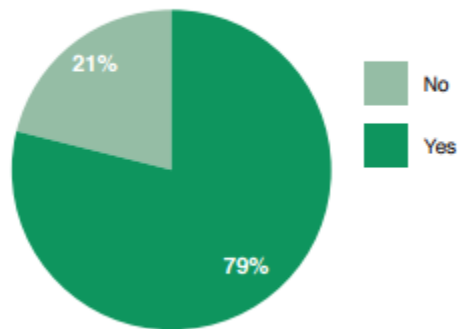


Source: Progress Report Survey (2013)

“As you can see from the pie graph, 56 per cent of teaching and non-teaching staff who responded indicated that they had participated in professional development activities geared specifically towards supporting First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.”

Bev moves to the next slide:

*Figure 4: Incorporation of Professional Development Training/Resources into Practice by Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff*

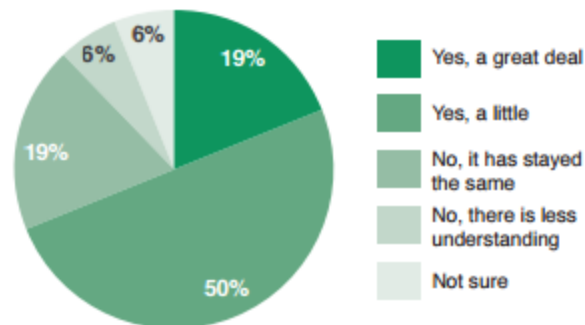


Source: Progress Report Survey (2013)

“A large majority of teaching and non-teaching staff who participated in First Nation, Métis and Inuit–focused professional development activities, such as knowledge and awareness building related to First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and perspectives, were able to use what they learned and translate it into their classroom practices.”



Figure 5: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Community Organizations' Perceptions of Capacity Building to Support Aboriginal Identity



Source: Progress Report Survey (2013)

“Finally, survey responses from First Nation, Métis and Inuit community organizations indicated a strong focus on building capacity to help support Aboriginal identity building, including the appreciation of Aboriginal histories, cultures and perspectives by all students and staff. Respondents felt that initiatives aimed at fostering supportive and engaged families and communities have increased with Framework implementation since 2007.”

Bev pauses again for a moment, trying to get a sense of her audience. Up to this point, everyone has remained quiet with some head nodding but nothing to suggest disagreement or disappointment with the survey findings. However, in her time working as an Aboriginal education officer, she knows better than to assume everyone is on the same page. Each of the Aboriginal education liaisons in the room have different size FNMI populations to consider and have more or less support from their Director or Superintendents when it comes to developing project proposals. It is not uncommon at lead meetings for concerns to be raised around funding, collaboration, community consultation, and capacity building among staff and students. She anticipates these same challenges will resurface at this meeting as well. Taking a seat at the large rectangular table, Bev takes a sip from her water glass and continues on,

“We are seeing significant increases in the range and number of professional development opportunities and resources offered to teaching and non-teaching staff. Schools are taking more initiative to embed FNMI perspectives in the curriculum and are creating learning experiences where FNMI students see themselves and their culture represented in the classroom. I imagine this information is not new news to any of you. I am eager to hear what you think after reviewing these results. Are the results from the *Progress Report* survey representative of your board’s community?”

Alexa responds: “Speaking from my own experiences only, I think we have made some progress since the policy’s release, but if I can be completely honest, I am not overly impressed by these survey results. We have been actively doing this work for six years, some of us for even longer, and nearly half of our teaching and non-teaching staff have not participated in targeted PD activities geared specifically towards supporting First Nation, Métis and Inuit students? That is discouraging. And although at first glance 79% appears to be a promising percentage of teaching and non-teaching staff incorporating what they learned at PD sessions into their classroom practice, how can we gauge appropriately through quantitative data whether educators are translating what they have learned respectively into their teaching practice?” Alexa shakes her head, “I try to help my colleagues the best I can so that they feel prepared and confident to infuse FNMI perspectives into their teaching, but I can’t be this person who is constantly looking over their shoulder assessing their performance, right? In this role, I don’t have time to teach, and unfortunately, I don’t think teachers have the necessary supports or resources they need to teach the curriculum in a culturally, respectful way. I am glad I am here to provide some support, but I am only one person. We have over 125 school sites, so it is really difficult to carry out this work in the way it deserves to be.”

“Thank you for sharing, Alexa. You make a really good point about the use of data and how both boards and the Ministry choose to use Aboriginal student-specific data, but also information collected through EQAO assessment results. Especially for boards with small numbers of FNMI students, how do you present data effectively, while showing the qualitative successes that happen within each of the boards? Unfortunately, quantitative data is often favoured over qualitative findings. I think it comes down to being a systemic issue. Education is a system, and although it is evolving and great things are happening that deserve recognition, we still feel this need to rely solely on numbers and percentages to measure system effectiveness and student achievement.”

Bev pauses before continuing, “I want to pick up on something you mentioned, Alexa, about educators’ overall levels of cultural awareness on issues related to or affecting Aboriginal students. What have people experienced when working with staff to increase their knowledge about FNMI cultures and perspectives? How have educators, administrators, and non-teaching staff responded to the professional development and in-services your board has hosted?”

Alexa quickly responds, “Fear is the single biggest thing that prevents people from making change when it comes to FNMI issues. I am almost positive of it. I see this over and over again. A huge fear.”

“I agree,” responds another woman sitting beside Bev. “They hear the topic and I think they are so concerned with doing something wrong, or saying something wrong, or teaching the wrong viewpoint, that they are afraid to even try.”

“You hit the nail on the head,” says Sheila. “I think, honestly, that many people are afraid to get it wrong. It is a very touchy subject...” Sheila hesitates for a moment. “I just feel that

people, instead of getting it wrong or saying the wrong thing, would just rather leave the topic alone completely.”

The rest of the people in the room all nod in agreement. Janice adds, “I think there is also a concern that a focus on FNMI cultures or perspectives will somehow take away from other content. I have to say, though, that I feel for teachers. They are being asked to teach all of this new content. Well, new to them anyway, and a lot of them have not been equipped with either the skills or the background knowledge to be able to teach it in a culturally competent way. A lot of teachers are unsure how to teach FNMI content and are worried they may say the wrong thing or offend someone accidentally. And then there are some teachers who unfortunately don’t see the value in it.”

“It’s a shame to me that most of the people I have spoken with at our board—teachers, administrators, non-teaching staff—didn’t even know there was a residential school nearby, or the name. And that’s not to shame those people; it’s to say that’s a problem, that’s a gap in our education system! Why don’t we know about this?” asks an older woman sitting near the back of the room.

“It is different than what they learned in university, or outside the scope of what they learned in university, and many people are reluctant to acknowledge that.” suggests Dianne. I wonder sometimes though if people might just be trying to preserve the history that they are comfortable teaching.”

Sheila speaks up, “Teachers don’t know everything about everything. Particularly when it comes to FNMI issues, people are not well educated. Some of us are lucky because we have relationships or family connections that have given us opportunities to experience more and to

know more. But generally, our education system fails when it comes to FNMI issues, and so a lot of people believe things that are actually myths.”

“I don’t know whether everyone gets the fact that this is not just a Native issue. It is a country issue!” Alexa announces, feeling herself growing increasingly irate. “I continue to hear ‘well why do I need to teach that? I don’t have any Aboriginal kids in my school.’ I have heard that many times, and that is shameful, because it is not about that—it is about understanding the history of our country and being open to all inhabitants of our country. I do think that is part of the problem though, hearing people say things like, ‘I don’t have any Native kids’ or ‘I have one at my school, why do I have to do all of this for one kid?’ That is when I want to respond with: we are not doing it for one kid, we are doing it for every child, because if we want to promote anything, we have to start with kids. We don’t want to have kids growing up with the same stereotypes that we grew up with. That is what we want to disrupt.”

“This is growing into quite an insightful discussion,” interjects Bev. “From listening to what everyone has shared, I get the impression many of the people you are working with on a daily basis are feeling increasingly overwhelmed with the idea of having to prioritize FNMI education. Would all of you share that sentiment?”

“Absolutely,” Dianne remarks. “Within the schools, we sort of have policy fatigue with our administrators. There are so many different initiatives going on right now that FNMI education is seen as one more. It is very challenging to try to get administrators to recognize that this is a priority with everything else that is going on.”

“Yes I see this as well in our board,” Sheila responds. “There is no block of time carved out so that we can do FNMI education. So people start saying, well I have to do numeracy, and I have to do literacy, and there is going to be this grade three and six testing, and I want my

students to be successful in that. So a lot of time, energy, and focus, even in board improvement plans, has been on doing better in those areas, but not on FNMI education.”

“You are right Sheila,” responds Janice. “Having not worked as a classroom educator, I am just amazed at how many things teachers are dealing with. I think that, more than ever, students come to school with loaded backpacks, and the backpacks are filled not with books but with concerns about mom and dad, about family, friends, social issues, what they saw on television last night, what they heard on the news this morning.... It is very hard to keep up with everything.”

“Yes, it really is,” affirms Bev. “The responsibilities each of you carry within your boards are so multifaceted that it can be difficult to balance everything all the time. So much of your work requires deliberate action planning, which can be difficult to do when it feels as though you don’t have buy in from all of your colleagues. Then, of course, there is the advocacy piece: advocating for your local FNMI communities, families, students, staff members, and making sure everyone has a voice in the conversation around FNMI education. In many ways, you each serve as the lynch pin for your board; you are what holds the various elements of this complicated structure we call FNMI education together. I realize, however, and I am sure all of you do as well, that this is by no means easy or fast work.”

“Nope it certainly is not,” maintains Sheila, letting out a deep sigh. “But I do see that cultural competencies are changing. I have seen it with our principals. They have a greater awareness and understanding of FNMI cultures and perspectives. I realize this is only the beginning and this is not going to change overnight, but if we keep going in the manner we are, we will see more change. One of the things we are working on right now is helping our staff to feel that they are in a great position to affect really important learning for our students.”

“When I first started this work, one of the prevailing attitudes in our board was let sleeping dogs lie. Why should we talk about Aboriginal education or peoples’ heritage? Let’s just leave that alone because it might stir up trouble. We may have backlash in the community. There might be all kinds of problems, and that fear kept us from having any discussions and doing anything,” remarks Deborah, who, up to this point has just been listening to the discussion unfold. “But I think there has been a really big culture change for our whole board; a building of a much more caring and collaborative community. I believe FNMI got that ball rolling, because it got people to talk to each other. It broke down some of the silos that existed and got people saying ‘this is what we are trying to do. These are our big goals.’ But how do we bring it all together to reflect what we want to do as a board?”

“Deborah you raise an important question that we will return to just after we take a quick break,” announces Bev, stealing a glance at the clock on the wall. “Can everyone aim to be back here in about 10 minutes?”

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### **Analysis and Synthesis of Qualitative Findings**

My approach to restorying was to review all of the interview transcripts, analyze them based on the research questions and goals of my study, and then reassemble parts of the data into a series of new stories. My purpose for writing the vignettes was to give readers a glimpse into the data, and to illuminate the experiences, thoughts, and emotions shared by participants during the data collection phase. I wanted to provoke readers to consider their own experiences in a way that invited them to respond to the issues the research allowed me to witness. Guided by my research questions, I was eager to learn how the Framework was enacted by policy actors throughout participating school boards. Given the theoretical underpinnings supporting my research, I approached my analysis and synthesis of my qualitative data from the point of view

that policy is not merely a static written text, condensed and packaged neatly into a series of vision statements, principles, and performance measures; instead, policy is something that is constantly evolving in a process of becoming. From this perspective, policy is more than a particular institution's intended goals and objectives. Rather, I approached this inquiry, and more specifically, my analysis, by paying close attention to the ways in which school boards "do" policy, as well as how educational policies, discourses and ensuing practices around Indigenous education and Indigenous student achievement are enacted differently as it is being performed and understood by the variety of actors involved in a particular policy situation.

From this standpoint, policy enactment involves a multiplicity of policy actors with differential knowledge, powers, adherences, and obligations that work on/through policy in ways that can concurrently produce productive and destructive effects. Thus, with Aboriginal education being identified by the Ministry as a key priority, I wanted to better understand how board representatives were instituting these policy initiatives. Had Aboriginal education maintained its position in priority across school boards since the policy Framework's introduction in 2007? What key milestones have been achieved thus far? What effect do school boards' stories of the Framework have on its enactment?

I started my analysis of the data by critically considering the nature, actors, processes, and effects of policy enactment. I looked beyond merely what the Framework says in its explicit language to how participants enacted and translated the FNMI Policy Framework into their professional practice. I began to wonder what actors do to negotiate policy. In listening to my participants, I was attuned to how they described the process of policy enactment. I was additionally interested in better understanding how educators and administrators are affected by new policy initiatives. For example, were there any substantial changes or modifications made to



participants' daily professional practices when the Framework was first introduced? In order to answer the above queries, I needed to identify the core activities Aboriginal education leads engaged in on a regular basis and how these activities influenced the work that they are doing and the action that they take. Lastly, I wanted to trace what kinds of assemblages were being created through this policy, as I recognized early on from my review of the literature that the Framework and the force it continues to bear is situated and sustained through a series of diverse linkages.

From the onset of my data collection, it became clear to me that there were a variety of human (e.g. students, teachers, administrators) and non-human actors (e.g. curriculum documents, text books, student record forms) that contributed to the achievement of the Ministry's goals for improving education outcomes of FNMI students. The most obvious contributors were the Aboriginal education leads designated by their respective school boards to enhance their board's internal capacity to ensure both teaching and non-teaching staff have the appropriate knowledge and understanding to meet the specific needs of FNMI students. These individuals played an invaluable role in leading the implementation of programs and initiatives to support Aboriginal student achievement and raise awareness and understanding of FNMI cultures, histories and perspectives.

From conversations with Aboriginal education leads, there was consistency in how each of them described their role and responsibilities within their particular school board. Broadly speaking, their responsibilities could be divided into six major categories: (a) Integrating the Framework into school board planning in order to improve Aboriginal student achievement; (b) Consulting on, developing, and implementing strategies for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification; (c) Facilitating board-wide professional development activities; (d)

Supporting classroom educators in adopting a variety of approaches and tools that respond to the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students; (e) Providing any additional individual student support required for students who identify as FNMI; and (f) Fostering supportive and engaged relationships with local FNMI families, communities, and service providers. I was not at all surprised by the description of responsibilities outlined by participants. These activities and responsibilities are clearly articulated within the Framework and subsequent policy progress reports, providing school boards and provincially funded elementary and secondary schools with guidelines to assist them in their planning and delivery of programs, services, and supports for FNMI students in Ontario. From this point of view, one would not expect there to be any substantial roadblocks preventing this important work from being done, especially since it is made explicit across both the Framework and *Building Bridges* document that Aboriginal education is one of the Ministry's top priorities. Yet, one's understanding of a specific policy can be incredibly impactful on how it is enacted by those responsible for implementing it. Thus, before I could delve deeper into the configuration of participants' professional practices, I needed to make clear to what degree participants' work was directly informed or influenced by the policy directives outlined in the Framework.

**Competing assemblages.** For many participants, the Framework provided a starting point for contextualizing the significance of their professional efforts. Participants were conscious of the fact that the Framework exerted a sense of legitimacy and urgency that was previously missing from discussions concerning the achievement of FNMI students in Ontario. To finally have an educational policy that looked at the educational achievement of FNMI students was no small feat. To see a policy emerge that not only recognized but also actively encouraged shared responsibility and cooperation across provincial governments, ministries,

educational institutions, and FNMI families, communities, and organizations to meet the specific needs of FNMI students was exciting and symbolized the kind of cultural integration and validation that scholars such as Kanu (2011) and Friesen and Friesen (2002) propose.

It comes as no surprise then, that some of the participants saw the Framework carrying institutional clout when positioned or presented as an initiative introduced and supported by the Ministry to improve student achievement and engagement for FNMI students. This is evident at the beginning of the vignette *Shifting Priorities* when Sheila displays an image of the policy's yellow cover during a professional development session, subtly signaling to others that Aboriginal education is important:

*She recognizes that the yellow cover on the screen carries power. The yellow cover shows educators and administrators that there is a policy on Aboriginal education and it needs to be made a priority.*

Combining this increased visibility of the Framework as a material text with a human face, someone like an Aboriginal education lead, or in this case, someone who identifies as Aboriginal, who can explain what the Framework is intended to do and why the policy is important within a localized context, further advances the Framework's legitimacy and credibility. These strategic actions taken on the part of participants were not coincidental. On the contrary, they were deliberately planned and performed as a way of carving out a space for Aboriginal education, whereby Aboriginal education and FNMI perspectives can be acknowledged and integrated into school communities and classrooms in an ongoing and fluid manner. The decision by Sheila to project an image of the Framework engages teachers in a conversation around policy enactment differently than if the image was not displayed. The prominent visual of the policy cover changes how Sheila and her audience interact. Displaying

such an image enables Sheila to gauge her audience's familiarity with the yellow cover up on the screen. For her audience, it breathes life into a text that may otherwise remain unknown. This brief encounter enrolls individuals into a relationship with the policy. They are forced into knowing that there exists a policy on Aboriginal education and, even further, the responsibility that teachers have to enact this policy directive and make it a priority in their professional practice.

Despite the intentional positioning of the Framework by Sheila at the front of the room, other competing assemblages are taking place that potentially weaken Sheila's and, by extension, the Framework's efforts. Sheila's position at the front of the room talking to school staff situates her as an outsider, as someone who is merely fulfilling an implementation role. Some teachers may regard Sheila as unapproachable, perhaps even detached from their professional realities, assuming she does not quite understand the extent to which educators are overburdened with tasks. Compulsory subject areas such as literacy and numeracy are situated within the dominant achievement discourse as pressing and requiring urgent attention, but the Framework and its associated aims and outcomes, despite addressing concerns around achievement, is more frequently perceived as an elective policy: something that others such as Sheila, who identifies as First Nations, and who provides an "Indigenous perspective," can and should be responsible for.

As the vignette unfolds, readers are introduced to how deeply affected Sheila was by the teacher's comments written on her son's paper, how its impact still weighs on how and why she pursues work in Aboriginal education. Politically, there is neglect, or perhaps a deliberate decision made by Sheila to not outwardly name the institutional structures that have created the fertile conditions for colonial oppression and the cultural imperialist practices that continue to serve as the bedrock for how school authorities discuss and position issues of Aboriginal student

achievement. Material objects (the Framework, Sheila's PowerPoint presentation) and practices (Sheila prompting her audience to look up at the image of the Framework) influence how both Sheila and the staff she is presenting to, perceive of, understand, and respond to the Framework.

This vignette demonstrates how the Aboriginal education lead, even if only temporarily, becomes incorporated into a professional environment that has been inundated with previous educational policies and improvement strategies, all of which collectively espouse a commitment to supporting learning and improving student achievement. Competing with these other policies, leads are left to work as salespersons, "selling" the Framework as though it is a product, trying to convince teachers to buy in. As a result, the distinctiveness of the Framework, as well as what it represents historically and culturally for Indigenous peoples, becomes lost and the authoritative colonizing discourses in Canada are left unquestioned. The status quo emerges once again and sustains itself, evident in how Sheila tows the line and decides not to share her personal story of oppression, returning to the institutional script she has prepared for her audience. It certainly begs the questions whether this scene between Sheila and school staff would play out differently if the policy was communicated explicitly as compulsory. As a starting point, the discussions would be board-level and would raise the profile of the Aboriginal education leads as more than advisors. What does this inaction say to First Nations people about their value in the eyes of the Ministry?

**Material texts as a strategic and influential tool.** Participants also suggested how material texts, those that embed language and information such as curriculum documents, email correspondences, student records, and grant proposals, played an integral role in legitimizing the course of their daily work and attracting policy actors to come together and connect. Similar to how the visual display of the Framework carried influence during Sheila's professional

development session, the materiality of the “texts” was another mechanism for Aboriginal education leads to communicate to administrators, educators, and support staff the message that Aboriginal education is, and remains, important. Reliance on, and regular reference to, these texts led Aboriginal education leads being invited to participate in certain conversations, provided a means to gain access to resources previously unavailable, and offered them access to enter spaces that were previously restricted. This new found access was most evident in conversations I had with participants around their involvement in developing their board’s voluntary self-identification policy.

As articulated in the Framework, the Ministry has encouraged each of Ontario’s 76 publicly funded school boards to work toward developing a voluntary FNMI self-identification policy, which offers the opportunity for all FNMI students attending provincially funded schools in Ontario and/or their parents to voluntarily and confidentially self-identify as having FNMI heritage so that boards are able to provide relevant and supportive programming for FNMI students. Collecting this information allows boards to obtain achievement data related to the achievement of FNMI students, provide culturally responsive resources, and assess their board’s progress toward achieving the goals outlined in the Framework. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b). Students and/or families can self-identify through two ways: (a) On the student registration form that is completed when a student registers with a publicly funded school for the first time or moves to a new school; or (b) On the student data verification forms that are distributed to students at the beginning of each school year. In addition to these mechanisms, school boards also rely on data from Statistics Canada to gauge the school-aged Aboriginal population of their local area, against which they can measure progress in Aboriginal student self-identification. It is important to note that processes of voluntary self-identification within

public education remain a controversial topic due to skepticism around the intentions, uses, and potential misuses of the collected data by the Ministry, as well as concerns over the ability of institutions to securely protect collected data. While a comprehensive discussion of these ongoing concerns is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to note that the implementation of voluntary self-identification policies and processes across school boards influenced how Aboriginal education leads negotiated their professional roles and what assemblages were created as a result of these negotiations.

In conversation with participants, all of them identified a gradual increase in the number of students and/or families self-identifying since the introduction of their board's self-identification policy. All of the participants were aware that the information collected through voluntary self-identification was the impetus driving their work forward. Having information regarding the overall student achievement of FNMI students was seen as beneficial to ensuring schools were providing relevant programming and academic support to FNMI students. It served as a measure to assess progress in FNMI student achievement, supported board improvement planning and accountability, and has been used to inform future policy and funding decisions across school boards and school authorities.

Both the 2009 and 2013 FNMI Policy Framework implementation progress reports have indicated an increase in the number of FNMI students and families who have chosen to self-identify. Moreover, both reports indicate improvement in Aboriginal student academic achievement related to FNMI students meeting provincial standards on province-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. From this over-arching systems perspective, participants recognized how quantifiable indicators of Aboriginal student achievement contribute to gauging the success of the implementation of the Framework. However, where concerns arose

was on the ground level, in the regular interactions and exchanges that leads had with administrators, educators, and support staff regarding the actions being taken by their board to achieve the Framework's outlined goals.

Participants indicated incidences where it was difficult to build their board's capacity and provide professional development opportunities focused on the needs of FNMI students due to reluctance on the part of board staff and administrators to become involved. A prevalent response from school administrators was *'but we don't have any Aboriginal students in our school.'* Similarly, leads would receive the same response from classroom teachers about their students. Within schools, there seemed to be an acceptance that the teacher(s) and school administrators were always correct in their assessment of who is Aboriginal and who is not. It was not until Aboriginal education leads presented quantifiable data suggesting that, in fact, Aboriginal students were enrolled in their school and were attending their classes, that school administrators and educators were prompted to take action. Recall the conversation between Vanessa and Alexa in the second half of the vignette *The Pendulum Swings*. Alexa shares with Vanessa the reluctance she often encounters from both teaching and non-teaching staff when it comes to engaging them in conversation specifically towards supporting FNMI students. She explains how quickly some staff dispel any acknowledgement that there are FNMI students in their schools, and it is only when she presents quantifiable "proof" of FNMI student representation that staff begin to listen:

*Self-identification data has become a form of currency for me. It is only when I go into a school and say your school has 20 self-identified FNMI students that administrators consider doing something. The data becomes evidence, prompting administrators to make FNMI education a priority.*



Comparable to the visual display of the Framework, the incessant reference to self-identification data by Aboriginal education leads in conversations with board staff is another example of Aboriginal education leads strategically situating themselves and their work within the safety of public education's institutional narrative. The desire for quantifiable evidence concerning Aboriginal student achievement has been outwardly stated at both the provincial and board levels. This is evident throughout the Framework and subsequent progress reports where emphasis has been placed on collecting accurate and reliable student level data. There is an obvious privileging of what Butler (2015) describes as "a gradual incorporation of neoliberal accountability discourses" (p. 40). What arises through this discursive shift is the continued perpetuation of a dominant, largely westernized discourse that says it is permissible to use standardized measures of achievement and numerical data as a means of comparing one group of people to another. What appears to emerge is a certain degree of complicity that lets the larger education system "off the hook", allowing individuals to abdicate their responsibilities towards the lack of insufficient funding and resourcing that is needed if the Framework's original intentions and goals are to be achieved.

As a result, Aboriginal education leads, by virtue of their positionality in leading the implementation of programs and initiatives related to the Framework's goals, are often forced to quantify the problem concerning Aboriginal student achievement, namely through the dissemination of related statistics and percentages. Again, this is carried out consciously and strategically by Aboriginal education leads. By situating the importance of Aboriginal education within empirical data, leads are in a better position to compel teaching and non-teaching staff to take appropriate, meaningful action. Evident across each of the vignettes are the ways in which Aboriginal education leads consistently have to bend their practice to accommodate for the

assortment of responses and behaviours they encounter from both educators and administrators. While on the surface, such adaptations on the part of leads may be expected and relatively straightforward, when one traces the material specificities of these performances, what becomes apparent is that bodies, dispositions, and understandings are produced at the point of a situated performance in specific environments (Fenwick, 2010), involving an entanglement of emotional, political, and material elements.

Having a visual representation of the Framework made prominent during presentations, regularly referencing the goals of the Framework in correspondences with educators and administrators, or merely making hard copies of their board's self-identification policy available on the table of a staff or community meeting exemplify what Ball, Maguire, & Braun (2012) describe as policy artefacts which "carry within them sets of beliefs and meanings that speak to social processes and policy enactments" (p. 121). For the Aboriginal education leads I spoke with, these artefacts exemplified small efforts of resistance on the part of Aboriginal education leads as they refused to no longer allow Aboriginal education and the needs and strengths of FNMI students to be silenced and ignored. Additionally, drawing on these representations of policy made it easier for policy enactors to gain buy in from individuals or groups who may have otherwise avoided or would have preferred to leave the topic of Aboriginal education alone completely.

The Framework and push for boards to establish policies and processes for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification become significant tools for compelling people to work collaboratively, reflect on and adjust their professional practice, seek out new knowledge, and begin addressing some of the reluctance or fear that may have prevented them from engaging in this important work earlier. With the increased visibility of the Framework, it

is easy to see how for some, this policy serves as an agent for change; it is also clear how its force has led to new assemblages coming together in the form of professional learning communities, Ministry and board funded initiatives, and the production and dissemination of perspectives and resources that recognize the contributions FNMI people have made and continue to make in society. The Framework is simultaneously entangled in myriad entities that are unpredictable and can in fact resist or counter the types of productive enactments of educational policy the Aboriginal education leads are working to promote.

**“I don’t really look at that anymore”:** **Outgrowing the Framework.** While the Framework served as a catalyst at the initial stages of the implementation process for some participants, others described a steadily declining reliance on the Framework since its induction. As a result, the degree to which participants’ work was directly informed or influenced by the policy directives outlined in the Framework also decreased:

Sarah: How much of your work is tied to this policy?

Kelly: First, it was a great place to start, but right now I think that, the more I looked at the policy, the more I realized...the whole policy wasn’t designed for schools that don’t have a large Aboriginal population...I mean they included everybody in it, in different ways, but really it seemed to me a document for people who either had a high Aboriginal student population or who had a high population of Aboriginal students who were coming from on reserve schooling or education...it did give me good I guess perspective when I first started. I don’t really look at that anymore [laughs] to be honest. I don’t really use that.

Beth echoed similar views:

There is a presumption in the Framework that we have an active community voice and that we have active stakeholders...it's the presumption of a ready-made community to consult with, and I understand there are not very many schools who are in our position, that don't have that...I feel like there are sometimes pieces of the policy that don't fit with who we are and sort of our diversity of the things that are going on...I think the FNMI Framework presumes that there is a large population in every board and that [pause] in our case we need to build understanding among people who are non-First Nations. That is a bigger priority for us in some ways.

The process of policy enactment becomes a back and forth movement of ongoing negotiation and translation. Both human and non-human actors are constantly interacting and colliding with one another, causing policy enactors to then live out policy in a variety of ways that can lead to both positive and negative effects. These effects are most evident in the vignette *Two Worlds Colliding*. Throughout the narrative, readers witness the increasing frustration Janice feels trying to enact strategies and activities from a Framework she describes as confining. This is complicated further as her own personal identity and positionality as an Indigenous woman is threatened and brought into question. She feels caught between two worlds, one that appears almost intolerant to the diversity of perspectives that exist between and within cultures and communities, and another that works tirelessly for equitable access to educational programming, support, and resources. Janice describes feeling as though she is straddling two worlds. She is unsure how to bridge these two worlds, knowing the task requires much more time and effort than she alone is able to provide. Nevertheless, she maintains a commitment to doing more to grow the capacity of her colleagues and students. Janice concludes: "*School boards have an accountability to their Indigenous partners and to students and their families. We have to at least*

*try to make things better. Our students deserve better*". As an outsider looking in, one can see why Janice is struggling. She is stuck between what a policy says and what the enactment of policy looks like in practice. The harder she tries to fit within the parameters of the policy Framework, the more difficult and uncomfortable the policy becomes for her to enact.

Perhaps, then, the decrease in reliance on the Framework is a result of participants' recognizing the Framework's limitations and maybe even its irrelevance to their local context. From discussion with participants', I learned that some saw the Framework as a distant representation of their local circumstances, absent of any consideration for what their local FNMI students, families, or communities might find meaningful. Others described the policy Framework as void of any consideration for the ordinary, lived experience and local conditions of the broad range of students, educators, communities, and organizations it affected. This, in turn, led participants to play different policy enactor roles beyond that of the primary policy interpreter.

Participants often described themselves as an advisor, data-gatherer, teacher, mentor, problem-solver, bridge builder, listener, and critic. These different roles were constituted through the diverse interactions participants had with human actors such as educators, administrators, parents, and First Nation communities and non-human actors such as compulsory curricula, board improvement plans, classrooms, student identification data, and funding. For example, at any one time, leads may be involved in a collaborative project with Native language teachers, writing a grant proposal to secure funds for a community engagement initiative, directing a student in crisis to appropriate counselling resources and support, and reporting on recent programming at a community advisory meeting. Wearing these multiple "hats" enabled them to circumvent any limitations they found in what the policy said so they could still meet the needs

of their school board population. Is it possible, then, that a declining reliance on the Framework came at the same time that some participants were building positive momentum in their work? From what some participants shared, yes. While a great initial reference point, some participants had outgrown the policy and were looking for opportunities that allowed for more innovation, creativity, and collaboration.

**“Community engagement is not a one-time thing”:** Reflecting on the process of **community consultation.** Consistent throughout my conversations with participants was the sensitivity paid to the broader historical and cultural discourses that have affected Aboriginal student achievement and resulted in intergenerational distrust of the current education system. It was important for participants in their professional roles to remain open-minded and avoid becoming ‘institutionalized’ by the education system and its culture. This issue arose in a number of conversations with participants who were constantly looking for ways to challenge the status quo and remain detached enough from the Framework to constantly question whether there were alternative ways of enacting the Framework’s goals and objectives in a manner that did not further isolate or marginalize Aboriginal peoples, cultures, and contributions.

Moreover, participants realized that how such policies and practices of communicating and collecting information around self-identification were developed and implemented was of equal, if not, more concern. Too often policies are seen as complete, with little reference made to the history of other policies that have been implemented prior, and which may have led to serious consequences or setbacks for the broad range of people it was intended to serve. Participants recognized for example, that there remain reservations concerning the collection of Aboriginal student data due to the legacy of the residential school system and feelings of intergenerational distrust of the education system. Thus, ongoing, extensive involvement and

consultation with FNMI parents, families, and community members was necessary for enacting the Framework. Julia, a former Aboriginal education lead, emphasized the importance of viewing community engagement as an ongoing process of building permanent, respectful relationships:

Julia: Community engagement is not a one-time thing...you don't just do this one engagement and walk away and that's it. It is ongoing; it is relationships. It is hard to even translate into a process. It is everything you do. It is not perfect all the time though, and it is hard because we have all of these competing interests...You have so much that you are trying to do that it hard to be perfect at it all, but I would say it is honest, it's candid, it's open, and it's uncomfortable too.

Kelly echoed Julia's sentiments during our conversation about her board's approach in developing their policy for self-identification:

Kelly: The first major thing that I was expected to do was to develop a policy for self-id. That was the main thing that was told to me when I first started...So I hit the pavement and just really went and visited all the organizations, trying to get a feel for the community and realized really quickly that it was not my business to be implementing any self-id policy right away. I needed to really develop those relationships...it was really imperative that we not push this because of some of the hesitancy among community members and organizations to even start collecting this information. We needed to establish good communication and relationships...and I did that for three years. We didn't even have a policy even though I was working on building those relationships. We didn't have a policy and that was okay with the board, thankfully...we really wanted to

go about it the right way. I don't know if it was the right way, but we went about it a different way that we hoped would be less intrusive.

I asked Kelly to describe in greater detail what relationship building looked like during those early years. I asked her what kind of actions or activities were taken to building lasting relationships:

Kelly: I would often just drop into the centers and just talk...without a reason. There was no purpose. I wasn't going there hoping to get anything, leave with something at the end. It was more just going in, asking what was new and just getting involved in the conversations that were happening around the tables that were there...it was really informal. I would literally go in there and I would come back and my boss would say, so what did you do? And I would say, well we just talked. I had to help him kind of wrap his head around the notion that you could go somewhere and not have to bring anything back from that. Just that you had a conversation. So a lot of that took place for three years.

Kelly's response can be interpreted as the establishment of an alternative form of community engagement that gradually took shape and developed strength over a substantial period of time. In this example, one sees how her community was brought together and strengthened when she consciously chose to circumvent the formal process of consultation that her board and superiors may have been more accustomed to following. In the process, she built trust and rapport among community members. The attention she paid to listening, as opposed to asking for or collecting information, was another careful decision she made. In doing so, she recognized the reluctance community members initially felt in response to the idea of her school board collecting self-identification data. Fortunately, she had the support of her supervisor to continue her work in this manner.



Through Kelly's story, it becomes clear that the development of a school board's voluntary, confidential self-identification process involves a number of key considerations. First and foremost, ongoing consultation is necessary to ensure all stakeholders have a clear understanding of board initiatives and know how to properly sustain respectful working relationships with Aboriginal students, families, and communities. Kelly's experiences shed light on the critical role of consultation in the implementation of any educational policy. It is additionally important to ensure there are internal communication practices in place within the educational organization to ensure widespread understanding of the Framework's goals among all board and school staff, including frontline administrative staff and school board trustees. It is imperative that all board representatives are able to provide accurate information about their board's self-identification policy and respond appropriately to concerns raised by families and communities.

**How to reach the most people for the best benefit: Logistical and ideological considerations.** Participants described a variety of logistical and ideological challenges that often impeded the professional development goals of the Framework from being achieved and delayed leads from moving forward with their board's projects and initiatives. One of the Framework's primary goals is to see substantial improvements in the percentage of FNMI students meeting provincial standards on province-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics. In order to achieve this goal, strategies have been outlined within the Framework to build capacity among educators and to promote system effectiveness, transparency, and responsiveness among educational stakeholders at all levels of influence. While there has been steadfast encouragement in recent years for greater participation from FNMI parents and communities on the part of the OME, school boards, and schools, some participants alluded to

lingering incongruities between local Indigenous communities and school boards in terms of how programming, resource allocation, and community engagement is conceptualized and put into practice, all of which result in varied levels of education support for FNMI students.

Further, some participants expressed grave concern about the approaches being taken to achieve Framework goals and the short, rigid timelines set to accomplish this work. A few participants commented on how attention was often placed on the individual student, with a focus on bolstering student academic success with some cultural “stuff” included. Little attention had been paid to what needs to change at the organizational level in order for Framework goals to be inclusive and beneficial to Aboriginal community partners, families, and students. Rebecca, also a former Aboriginal education lead, described her experiences implementing the Framework’s goals as often confusing and an unbalanced distribution of power:

Rebecca: It is critical in [this] position to make sure you are being a true liaison, going out to the communities, getting their ideas about things and bring them back to the board and advocating...I just felt that piece wasn’t being respected and that there was still this notion of we are coming from these senior roles in the board and we are going to tell people what is best for them and that’s what we are going to do. That really changed the role significantly for me.

In the above excerpt, one can identify differences in how community engagement is perceived, defined, and carried out between school boards and communities. One can also, interestingly enough, identify what kinds of sociomaterial forces shaped, invited, and regulated community engagement in the contexts described above. In Rebecca’s experience, there were changes in senior leadership part way through her time in the position that, in her opinion, directly impacted the interpretation and delegation of tasks concerning FNMI education and in turn, the

establishment of respectful and reciprocal relationships with community members. Rebecca indicated that the individuals who were now responsible for the FNMI portfolio had no previous experience working in Aboriginal education and no pre-established relationships with the local First Nation communities her school board served. Rebecca's comments pointed to the lack of cultural competency held by senior administration and its direct impact on the direction her board was taking to implement the Frameworks goals. This raised ethical concerns for Rebecca about how resources were being used and how projects were being conceptualized and implemented. It additionally left Rebecca feeling as though her work and professional expertise had little value and influence. She described how she felt there was a lack of responsibility being taken on the part of the school board to acknowledge and address the systemic barriers and processes that contribute to the continued marginalization of FNMI students within the current education system:

Rebecca: I really think the thinking is still that there is a problem with the students that needs to be fixed. I don't think there is a real solid understanding that there is a problem with the system and that the two are interconnected...being in administration is very process oriented...other people were very concerned with facilitating the process without thinking about whether it was the right process or came out with the right outcome. That, I think, is another impediment to things being done in a way that is going to be beneficial to students and communities. You have a process, you follow it, and you don't question it and that thinking has been embedded in the culture of the place...I am not saying there is a problem with process thinking, but you have to have critical thinking paired with that or it's dangerous.

Lucy also commented on the system challenges she faced in doing this work:

Lucy: There were times where I really felt kind of isolated. I always had the communities to turn to, but entrenched within this system it was just me right. I didn't have a lot of context to speak to within this board. There was the odd teacher here and there, but yeah, there were times where people tried to stifle my voice, especially administrators...the whole idea of the administrator to me almost goes against what is good for FNMI people in general because they hold this position that is considered to be so important...I think the system we have created or that exists is a system where they have to have this control over what goes on in their building and it is so difficult for them in particular to wrap their head around the idea that maybe I should try something different. Maybe I should not pull out the big boss card on this particular occasion; maybe that is not my best option.

Overall, many participants' alluded to educational programming and supports often being deficit-based with little consideration for the possibility that organizational practices and processes may be contributing to the many issues affecting Aboriginal student achievement and subsequent negative feelings of belonging and inclusiveness at school. From Rebecca and Lucy's examples, one might identify a domino effect occurring in which a lack of cultural competency and mishandled delegation of tasks on the part of senior supervisors leads to miscommunication; in turn, Aboriginal education leads feel as though their principals or senior administrators are intentionally trying to stifle their voice. Other participants echoed similar sentiments, cognizant that in certain spaces, such as board meetings or professional in-service activities, their voices may be silenced or their intentions as policy enactors possibly misunderstood. Many participants described instances in their professional lives when they felt themselves caught between needing to tow the policy line versus enacting what they felt was the ethically appropriate response to

particular circumstances. The following excerpt from the vignette, *When is Good Enough not Enough?* illustrates this succinctly:

*Dianne can't help but feel at times caught between serving the policy and serving the student...More professional development is sorely needed not only for teachers and senior leadership but also the frontline workers—educational assistants, school secretaries, janitorial staff...but right now she is barely able to scratch the surface...She often wonders in what ways she may be compromising her own core values in the role she has now. When is good enough not enough?*

Similarly to Janice in *Two Worlds Colliding*, the reader gains insight into the internal dialogue racing through Dianne's mind. Dianne's thoughts are painted with doubt. She is concerned about whether her board's efforts around Aboriginal education are having any meaningful impact. With limited support and assistance to do her work, she recognizes the potential shortfalls that will ensue and the population it will most effect: students. Throughout the vignette, the challenges of her work spill over into how she comes to perceive of her effectiveness in the role as Aboriginal education lead. The limitations and restraints of policy enactment lead her to potentially compromise her own core values.

Feelings of being caught-between surfaced in many of the conversations I had with participants. One participant, Julia, regularly made reference to the impending pressure she felt to always move the work forward while ensuring the needs of FNMI students and communities were being heard and met:

Julia: You are always thinking. You are thinking the proposal is coming in six months. I know I am going to have to turn that around quickly, okay what are our projects going to be next year. You always have to be forward thinking. You are trying to implement the

projects you have committed to and spend the money, but you are also trying to think ahead: okay what have I been hearing from people? What are the needs? How are we going to measure that? What's going to be the next project that we are going to do to take it to the next level?

Julia was not the only participant who described circumstances in which she had to manage multiple, often competing, agendas and interests to fulfill the responsibilities of her role. Such feelings were compounded by what many participants described as *policy fatigue*, a term used by one participant to describe the feelings that ensue when administrators, classroom educators, and support staff have a number or different Ministry initiatives going on simultaneously that they are expected to familiarize themselves with and implement. The following quote from Jim further illustrates the pressure that is felt by many Aboriginal education leads and school boards more largely:

Jim: I have like 10 balls that should be in the air at all times. And so it [Aboriginal education] doesn't get enough attention unfortunately...you get a call from Toronto from Tracey Smith [pseudonym assigned] and you know you have to do something. And then you do it and you hear these great stories about what is happening in other boards and you think, boy I wish I could do more and you get all these great ideas but then making them happen when you are just one person or a small committee is very difficult...and if we get smaller again, which is the way most boards are going right now, that means instead of having 10 balls in the air there will be 12.

Aboriginal education leads spend a majority of their time advocating for people and issues who historically and contemporarily have not been valued or well understood in the education system.

It does not come as a surprise that an overarching theme that emerged during data analysis was the increasing concern from participants on how to reach the most people for the best benefit.

Participants described how the Framework served as an initial tool for translating information regarding Aboriginal student achievement across different spheres. From there, it was the role of Aboriginal education leads to enroll different actors—both human and non-human—into their network around Aboriginal education reform. Translation in this instance involved bringing together the leads' interest in building the capacity of their school board to respond to the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students together with the Ministry's interest in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Participants described their work as enrollers often being met with resistance. Resistance was embedded in the attitudes of educators who asked, 'Why do I have to incorporate FNMI perspectives into my teaching when I don't have any FNMI students in my class?' Reluctance was felt at the school board level, whereby school board improvement plans dedicated a lot of time, energy and focus to raising standardized test scores in literacy and numeracy but mentioned nothing about increasing staff and students' capacity in FNMI studies. In preparation for such encounters, some of the Aboriginal education leads described instances in which they would arrive at professional development sessions or consultation meetings armed with copies of the Framework and their board's self-identification policy. Others mentioned how they would draw on relevant research reports in an attempt to position the goals of the Framework within their board's localized context. By deliberately drawing on supplementary material texts, like government sanctioned reports, leads hoped they would have a better chance shifting their colleagues' perspectives around Aboriginal education and help them see this work as part of their professional responsibilities.

Participants acknowledged that Aboriginal educational reform strategies are constrained by ongoing misunderstanding, inadequate system support, and the perpetuation of discourses that enable structural racism and neocolonialism to prevail on a tacit level. Evident too is how willfully school board staff at all levels in the organization elect the position of “perfect stranger” as coined by Dion (2007). Despite a policy directive that commits to supporting staff in adopting a variety of approaches and tools to support, teach, and assess Aboriginal students more effectively, staff, whether consciously or unconsciously, continue to distance themselves from opportunities to engage in new learning and consciousness raising. Instead, they reassert control by situating their excuses as a result of limited time or expertise, or by redirecting the responsibility onto the shoulders of Aboriginal education leads as their problem to deal with.

As a result of such unwillingness on the part of certain policy actors, levels of rigidity began to form, causing the individuals who are responsible for enacting policy to become inhibited in what they can and cannot do. Such resistance, when faced time and time again, places significant strain on relationships and leads to eventual feelings of compassion fatigue for those individuals working in a field that is historically fraught with intergenerational distrust, misunderstanding, and trauma.

## **Summary**

The presentation of my qualitative findings, represented through the vignettes and ensuing explanation of prominent themes, highlights the impact that both human and non-human actors can have on the enactment of the Framework. The synthesis of findings put forth illustrates how Aboriginal education leads are influenced by a number of actors and agendas that, when taken up in certain spaces, lead to the establishment of particular assemblages that can then modify, transform, or distort the aims and objectives of the Framework. In this chapter, I intentionally chose to foreground the experiences of my participants because I was interested in



how they, as policy actors, negotiated and made sense of the difficult webs they often became entangled in and that complicated how the Framework was enacted. I acknowledge that I am unable to follow all of the actors involved in and present throughout the process of this policy's implementation. The time and resources required to do such work are beyond the scope of this study.

What I have attempted to do instead is follow my participants as they shared with me what each of them experienced or negotiated, as well as what they felt imprisoned or inspired by, emotionally and materially, in the course of their enactment of the Framework. I recognize I am limited by what my participants chose to disclose. As a researcher, I can only present stories about participants' experiences. Regardless, participants' voices were very important in telling me about what they do so I could then trace the objects, routines, rules, divisions of labour, and other policies influencing how the Framework has been enacted. Rather than determine whether this policy has been appropriately or wrongly implemented, I asked: How is this policy moving? What/who is mobilizing it? How does this policy influence what people do? How are people engaging with this Framework? What forms of knowledge are taken up, circulated, blocked, and transformed by policy actors? I will respond to these questions in the final chapter of my dissertation as well as discuss the inherent inseparability of the material and the social when discussing policy work within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. Recommendations will then be made on how this research can inform future policies and practices at the systemic, policy, and school board levels.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion and Implications for Research and Practice**

I begin this chapter by providing a summary of the study. I remind readers of the research problem that prompted my qualitative study and my purpose for pursuing this area of research. Next, I briefly outline my approach to doing this research, making explicit for readers the theoretical and methodological tools I relied on to inform my research practice. I then consolidate my research findings in response to each of the research questions I outlined in Chapter One. Lastly, I attend to the limitations and strengths of this study and conclude by providing recommendations for how this research study can inform future research and action at the systemic, policy, and board levels.

### **Summary of the Study**

I have focused my study on the enactment of the Framework, a policy directive that was introduced by the OME in 2007 as a means of improving student achievement and engagement for FNMI students. I conducted in depth interviews with current and former Aboriginal education leads as well as senior administrators, all of whom were responsible for bringing the Framework's directive to fruition within their respective school boards. Following the interviews, I used the critical incidents that participants recalled and shared with me to understand the social and material forces influencing how the Framework is being negotiated and enacted across the province of Ontario. It was my intention to highlight the important relationships between materials and social dynamics as a way to critically assess whether the strategies, activities, and outcomes outlined within the Framework and subsequent progress reports have been effectively and respectfully addressing the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students.

## **Significance of the Study**

My rationale for choosing to focus on the Framework stems from my personal and professional experiences working in the area of Indigenous education. As a classroom teacher, I have felt and witnessed how difficult it can be to support Aboriginal learners effectively in their schooling experiences. I recognize the effort and preparation that is required to deliver culturally responsive education in a respectful and fluid manner. I understand the challenge involved in trying to engage both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in critical conversation and reflection about why Indigenous education should be prioritized across the education system. I know, too, how isolating, even debilitating, it can feel to do this work, feeling as though you are having to compete with myriad other popular topics in public education that deserve equal attention. Experiences like these led me to wonder whether others involved in this work shared similar experiences. I was curious to know whether others felt the tension of being involved in a field of work that can be equally difficult and fulfilling. At a time in Canadian history when both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are being encouraged to participate in reconciliation efforts related to the residential school system in Canada, I saw an opportunity to engage with others in study and reflection about what it means to create a new understanding of our shared past, present, and future.

From the onset of this dissertation, my goal has been to dig deeper into what educational policy in the area of Indigenous education says to better understand what it can do for students, parents, educators, administrators and government stakeholders, especially when it comes to increasing opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and issue resolution around the topic of student achievement. I realize, however, that humans are not the only actors involved in the implementation of educational policy. The enactment of policy is an ongoing process of situated interactions, interpretations, and recontextualizations that involve both material and

social forces. Objects, environment, humans, culture, and technology are all implicated in bringing forth the possibilities and problems of policy. Before I could delve into the action-oriented component of policy, what a policy such as the Framework could potentially do for improving and enhancing Aboriginal student achievement and Aboriginal education in Ontario more broadly, I needed to better understand the relationship between policy, people, and objects.

I foregrounded the focus of this policy analysis on the policy actors involved in enacting the Framework. I was most interested in how participants felt the Framework was being storied and enacted in their respective school boards: how their enactments of the policy were influenced by other human and non-human actors, and how participants were transformed through these interactions. I wondered in what ways the sociomaterial impacted how educational policy directives were interpreted and enacted. I was curious to see what contributions sociomateriality might offer in improving education outcomes for FNMI students and establishing and sustaining respectful relations between Indigenous families and communities.

## **Findings**

In this study, I was interested in how policy networks emerged, persisted, strengthened, and dissolved as policy actors connected with and effected one another. I was drawn to how sociomateriality influences what objects/artefacts/actors assemble in the coordination of policy directives within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. I wanted to better understand the impact these connections and associations have on how the Framework is enacted. The study findings are organized in relation to the three research questions posed at the beginning of the study and are discussed in light of the relevant literature where appropriate.

**In what ways are the strategies, activities, and outcomes outlined within the Framework and subsequent progress reports responding to the provincial government's goals of improving Aboriginal student achievement and engagement?** The Framework states

quite explicitly that its primary goal is to improve educational outcomes for FNMI students. Outlined throughout the Framework are a number of strategies that detail the activities and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, school boards, and schools. The Ministry is explicit in stating that the strategies outlined in the Framework “are meant to be a starting point only. All parties are encouraged to identify additional measures that would contribute to meeting the Framework goals, particularly strategies that reflect local circumstances.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9). The Framework is an Ontario policy and, as a result, all school boards should be abiding by the policy. It is the responsibility of school boards and schools to breathe life into this document, to ensure it is in fact alive and working in schools to meet the province’s goals for improving outcomes of FNMI students.

This study demonstrated that there is inconsistency between the values espoused at the Ministry level and what becomes enacted across school boards. In the four provincially funded school boards involved in this study, tremendous variability existed in how the strategies, activities and outcomes outlined within the Framework were taken up. Participants identified a number of factors that influenced to what extent their individual school board delivered programs, services, and supports for FNMI students. These factors included the following:

- The number of self-identified students who lived within the school board’s jurisdiction;
- Geographic proximity to First Nation communities and support services
- Whether or not tuition agreements existed between First Nation communities and school boards
- Compulsory curricula
- The legacy of the residential school system

- Structural racism
- Existing organizational structures at the school and school board levels
- Course availability and enrollment
- The willingness on the part of educators, administrators, and support staff to increase their knowledge and cultural awareness of Aboriginal perspectives
- The level of commitment by someone in a senior role to advocate on behalf of the Aboriginal education lead and/or First Nation community
- The level of priority Aboriginal education is given in a school board's improvement plan
- The amount of funds the Ministry and school boards allocate specifically to Aboriginal education initiatives
- The circulation of other educational policies that are expected to be enacted
- The variety of documentation and communication practices involved in the distribution and exchange of information concerning the Framework.

Depending on how these factors intersected with one another, the resulting actions produced both positive effects, such as increased understanding and collaboration, as well as negative effects: feelings of frustration, constraint, discomfort, fatigue, and fear.

Participants offered interesting articulations of what improving achievement meant to them and how this translated into their professional practice and enactment of the Framework. Rarely did participants use a surge in high test scores as proof that educational outcomes for Aboriginal students were improving. On the contrary, when participants recalled their stories of success, they were often situated outside of the classroom: student-led symposia, community-driven events, experiential professional development sessions for staff, involvement in

committee work, and spontaneous encounters with parents and community members.

Participants understood the rationale for locally developed targets and the need on the part of the Ministry to collect Aboriginal student specific data to support improvement planning and inform future policy and funding decisions. Regardless, they knew too that measuring success through specific performance measures, attendance records, graduation rates, and other similar measures, was not enough to demonstrate if real change had occurred.

While these indicators serve a particular purpose, they certainly do not provide a complete picture of system-wide change. As Cherubini and Hodson (2008) assert, “there appears to be a fundamental disconnect between the re-conceptualization of teachers’ pedagogical and assessment practices in mainstream schools to account for Aboriginal learners’ predilections, and measuring student achievement by the imposed western colonial paradigm of standardized testing” (pp. 14-15). Such contradictions raise concern as to whether the OME is genuinely committed to creating a better future for Aboriginal children and youth. Similarly, I am left wondering whether the creation of the Framework was a means for temporarily satisfying, or even rendering invisible, the concerns expressed by Aboriginal communities and organizations.

Participants were forthright in stating how difficult it was to gauge whether actual progress was happening. They had quantitative data and anecdotal evidence collected from parents and community members to rely on, but when it came to assessing the delivery of relevant content, identifying whether or not teachers were incorporating Aboriginal perspectives and activities into their planning, or determining the frequency or how administrators interacted with families and students, such grey areas were challenging for participants to comment on. They could speculate of course, but participants did not want to be perceived as looking over another’s shoulder to impose judgement or blame. As a result, there is little solid evidence to

demonstrate whether system-wide change has occurred as a result of the Framework or whether there is evidence for the quality of the outcomes. This is not to chastise educators or administrators, but rather to draw attention to the fact that there needs to be greater focus placed on establishing well-informed, collaborative, iterative processes that drive actual improvements with a targeted focus on integrating FNMI values, educational practices, and protocols throughout the school system as well as increasing the representation of individuals who self-identify as FNMI in higher, supervisory positions at the superintendent and trustee level.

**How are these strategies, activities, and outcomes storied, negotiated and enacted by educators?** In conversation with my participants, it was clear that they were grateful to have the Framework to refer to in their roles as policy enactors. They saw the Framework as an agent for change, a tool they could use to build capacity within their school boards. Identified by many participants as a policy for all staff and students, the policy also served to strengthen relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. Having a material text to cite in conversations with other educational stakeholders enabled participants to use the Framework as a bridge, an entry way into conversations with particular individuals who were previously inaccessible. The Framework became a mechanism for negotiating rules, expectations, routines, processes, and reform as well as a means for maintaining accountability across the Ministry, school boards, and schools.

Yet, these productive effects of having a policy that focuses directly on improving educational outcomes for Ontario's FNMI students does not come without its challenges. It was not uncommon for participants to describe instances when they encountered reluctance from colleagues with whom they were attempting to engage in critical discussion about particular issues affecting Indigenous students. A more unsuccessful attempt is evident in *The*



*Pendulum Swings* when Alexa draws purposely on relevant statistics and percentages to both educate and emphasize the fiduciary obligation of the federal government to her audience. Although her audience appears initially receptive to this new information, one staff member grows increasingly uncomfortable with the direction Alexa's presentation takes and ultimately responds defensively to Alexa, accusing her of delivering a somewhat racist presentation: "*With all due respect Alexa, I can't help but find your presentation somewhat racist and it is making me uncomfortable. I don't think it is helpful for anyone, especially Indigenous peoples to be dwelling on the past. They need to move on*".

As the vignette continues, it becomes quickly evident that the frustration and disappointment Alexa describes is not an isolated event. In fact, when Alexa relays her interaction with the female staff member the next day to Vanessa, a former Aboriginal education lead, it is confirmed that such confrontations are not uncommon. The conversation that follows between Alexa and Vanessa exemplifies how social and material forces can organize and dominate human actors, their work, and knowledge. What emerges from the Framework are not merely a set of goals, strategies, and performance measures aimed at improving student achievement and well-being among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, but also assemblages that order and govern how the Framework is enacted. Similarly, the displeased staff member in *The Pendulum Swings* did not come to her discomfort on her own. Human and non-human entities throughout her professional and personal life configured: curriculum documents; time commitments, workload issues, social relationships, textbooks, prevailing stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, and regulatory bodies have all exerted force on her to influence and produce how she comes to assume her role as an educator, what she denotes as "legitimate" knowledge, and how she responds to different, perhaps unfamiliar, forms of knowledge.

Consistent in responses among leads was their recognition that educators and administrators are a product of a compulsory curriculum, mandated through the Education Act and its accompanying regulations, all of which are entrenched in a colonial legacy that is framed in relation to “the evolving needs of a knowledge society governed by relationships based on knowledge, information, and market competition” (Wotherspoon, 2008, p. 390). The exchange between the female staff member and Alexa, noted above, is the nexus whereby these tensions erupt with consequences for other practices, actors, identities, and so forth. For Alexa and many of the participants, these consequences include feelings of defeat, the perpetuation of the status quo, a missed opportunity to critically engage a staff member, and the realization that there are insufficient resources and support available.

Participants encountered frequent limitations in their overall ability to build capacity among their school board. The realization of how little their colleagues knew about the residential school system, colonization, treaty rights, the Indian Act, discrepancies in funding between schooling on reserve versus provincially funded schools, and even the denial by some school staff that Aboriginal students were enrolled in their schools meant participants were having to invest a lot of time and effort into educating their staff on these issues. Participants were often unable to move ahead with addressing the primary objective of improved student achievement and engagement for Aboriginal students without first ensuring their staff had a foundational understanding of these key issues and their ongoing effect on Aboriginal students’ experiences of schooling.

All participants recognized that the construct of achievement was more than a human generated force by which individuals seek to reach a particular level of mastery or expertise. Not only were they able to account for the entanglement of human and non-human forces that

contributes to and/or limits how achievement is understood and enacted within the provincial education system, but they were also aware of how deeply entrenched these forces remain in Eurocentric ways of thinking and doing education. As a result, it was not uncommon for participants to describe moments of tension whereby they felt constrained in performing their professional roles and responsibilities.

I have come to the conclusion that the metanarrative of achievement is fraught with complex entanglements of the social and the material. Working on the frontlines, Aboriginal education leads are continually having to mediate relationships between the Ministry, First Nation communities, and school board personnel. They are often the ones overburdened with the task of being lead data gatherers, all while working within a system that is embedded in material action and interaction. It is not enough to disseminate survey results and espouse percentages as a means to gauge and measure Aboriginal learner's achievement levels. The incessant collecting and privileging of quantitative data through provincial assessments, funding reports, and checkboxes on registration forms and grant proposals; the distribution of surveys assessing stakeholders' overall effectiveness and satisfaction with the Framework's implementation; the recurring use of terms such as "evidence-based practice", "baseline data", and "performance measures" for describing and determining the success of the Framework's implementation; and the presentation of achievement results through specific, measurable indicators: all of these are examples of materials that exert force to change and shape how policy actors assume particular roles and interact with other human and non-human things to generate certain knowledges and stories about Aboriginal student achievement in Ontario's public education system. Through any one of these mechanisms, Aboriginal education leads, classroom educators, principals, parents, even students, are forced to connect with the policy, even if only for a moment.

The diversity in each of the participants' stories demonstrates the range of network effects that can emerge in material webs of human and non-human assemblages. The series of vignettes shared in the previous chapter made visible some examples of the types of positive and negative network effects that have surfaced since the Framework was introduced:

- The establishment of voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification policies across all Ontario school boards
- The designation of Aboriginal education leads within boards, schools, and classrooms; a greater number of FNMI advisory committees working in partnership with school boards to support implementation of the Framework's goals
- An increase in the amount of Indigenous resources available to support integration of FNMI knowledge and perspectives into the curriculum
- Revisions to provincial curricula
- Feelings of isolation
- Resistance from individuals who impugn the value of the Framework or who remain unreceptive to incorporating new content or teaching methods into their daily instruction
- Policy fatigue
- Varying levels of autonomy on the part of Aboriginal education leads
- The privileging of certain organizational routines and expectations over others
- Targeted funding toward initiatives that coincide with the Framework's goals
- Increases in the collection, analysis, and use of quantitative data to track and measure Aboriginal student achievement

- Little change to organizational structures at the school board level

The ways human actors come to intra-act (Barad, 2007) with other material entities produces particular purposes and effects in education, ranging from productive to destructive (Fenwick & Landri, 2012).

ANT traces the way things come together, showing how the social and material entities that participants described and labelled as Aboriginal education, policy work, and achievement do not exist separately from one another. Instead, they are deeply entrenched and continually assembling to reproduce, govern, and sustain certain forms of practice in the arena of Aboriginal education while negating others (Fenwick, 2012; Gherardi & Nicolini, 2000). It is apparent that sociomaterial forces are influential in terms of how participants come to perceive and navigate their professional interactions and obligations as it concerns the enactment of educational policy.

**How might a critical examination of the narratives surrounding achievement contribute to increasing the capacity of educators, school boards, and government officials to respond to the learning and cultural needs of FNMI students?** The decision to draw on the critical element of narrative inquiry while adopting a sociomaterial lens to examine the research problem was an intentional one. From the onset of this research journey, I wanted my scholarly contribution to disrupt what Levinson, Flint, & Van Sluys (2006) refer to as “commonplace understandings” (p. 198). I wanted readers to look below the surface and challenge what is taken for granted about ‘achievement’ within the Framework.

The findings from this study demonstrate the vast amount of work that still needs to occur in order to enable school systems and educators to respectfully and reciprocally respond to the learning and cultural needs of Indigenous students, their families, and communities. Absent from the Framework is any discussion around how achievement is conceptualized from an

Indigenous worldview. Instead, the prevailing message is one that privileges a colonial model to measuring achievement, largely entrenched in neoliberal notions. This is a prime example of institutional racism. Advancing Indigenous student achievement requires more than a one size fits all approach. Rather, what is needed is a focus on relationship building between Indigenous communities, curriculum change that integrates Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into programs, and innovations in teaching and learning to enhance Indigenous student success as well as all students' understanding of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous or not, developing a deeper understanding of Indigenous culture and knowledges is necessary to creating a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Exploring the problem using sociomaterial and narrative tools provides critical insights into what educational leaders responsible for enacting the Framework experience as they confront the complexities of enacting this policy. Utilizing sensitizing concepts from ANT as the theoretical underpinning for this research draws attention to how embedded materiality is in how the Framework has been communicated and systemized. While others have engaged in critical analyses of the Framework, attention had not been paid to the lived experiences of those responsible for operationalizing this policy. This study is distinct from others involving the Framework because it foregrounds the qualities and contributions of material entities themselves, particularly the ways they act on policy and within educational processes (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011).

### **Limitations and Strengths of the Research Study**

A limitation of this study is that I only recruited individuals who have held or currently hold Aboriginal lead positions rather than broadening the study to include classroom teachers, principals, and school support staff. To be practical, qualitative research involving interviews and anecdotal note taking across multiple school boards must be limited to a set number of

participants. The purpose of this study was to make visible the processes of how constructions around achievement become legitimated and eventually normalized into the educational system through policies such as the Framework. To explore this phenomena, I was most interested in how the Framework was being storied and enacted by those individuals whose professional work was most closely entwined in the Framework. While I acknowledge that the experiences of other school board staff may be similar to those experiences of the individuals I interviewed, I felt it was important – and unique, owing to their involvement in border-work (Haig Brown, 2012) – to purposefully target individuals who had or are currently fulfilling Aboriginal lead roles.

Specifically, border-workers are those individuals who find themselves between two dissimilar worlds or realities; yet, because of their personal or professional circumstances and associations, they choose to navigate the ever-present tensions of having involvement or relationships in each. As Haig-Brown describes: “To a greater or lesser extent, they identify themselves and are identified by members of the dominant society as different from and yet a part of mainstream society” (p. 231). The individuals I contacted identified a number of assumptions, tensions, and transitions in their professional roles that have influenced the nature and practice of their current/previous job responsibilities in distinctive ways.

Returning to the tenets of ANT, I was interested in moving away from a focus on only the individual practitioner to include exploration into the range of social forces and materials that create or inhibit certain conditions of work for these educators. The conditions these educators work in are mediated by a variety of agencies, policies, expectations, and assumptions that differ in nature from those of classroom educators, principals, and support staff. I was interested in learning how these different material forces and interpersonal dynamics restrict or enhance my participants’ ability to fulfill their board’s goals and objectives. My interest in speaking with this

particular population allowed me to examine and make visible any problems or challenges that might be inhibiting how the promise of equitable educational opportunities for Aboriginal students is being interpreted and actualized across the province. This is especially important given the target date of 2016 for the OME to address concerns over educational achievement for Aboriginal students. In light of this potential limitation, I casted a large net in my recruitment of participants, and I later interviewed participants who hold administrative positions within their respective school boards in the hopes of obtaining participants who were representative of, and knowledgeable about, Ontario's diverse student population.

Another limitation of this study was that I did not have equal representation of public school boards in comparison to Catholic school boards. In total, I received consent to conduct research from four school boards—three public school boards and one catholic school board. Concerted attempts were made during recruitment to ensure I had a balanced representation of both public and Catholic school boards. I recognize there could be differences in the way the Framework is enacted due to the different contexts. I did ask participants who were employed by a Catholic school board whether or not they felt working within a Catholic education system influenced the enactment of the Framework; however, data collected from these participants demonstrated that this did not have a substantial impact on the delivery and outcomes of the Framework. Nevertheless, I recognize that future research could explore in greater depth the contextual differences in integrating Aboriginal education within a public school board as opposed to a Catholic school board.

### **Implications for Practice and Further Research**

Attending to the objects/artefacts/actors involved in the creation and coordination of education directives within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario enables those involved in policy work to “attune very closely to the connections, but also to tinker and improvise, to



interrupt, and to seize emerging possibilities” (Fenwick, 2014b, p.45). Within the context of this study, such emerging possibilities can include prompting stakeholders at the Ministry, school board, and individual school levels to consider how the Framework enables/prevents productive enactments of educational responsibility. Based on the findings of this study, I propose suggestions for further research and development at the systemic, policy, and school board levels.

**Systemic level.** Findings presented in this study support the claim that since the launch of the Aboriginal education strategy in 2007, progress has been made on the implementation of the Framework. The 2009 and 2013 progress reports published by the Ministry also support this claim. However, critiques on the Framework exist, arguing that despite its best intentions, the Framework and the values underpinning it remain largely situated within a colonial institutional structure, such that Aboriginal education continues to be relegated to the margins. This too was confirmed by participants who shared instances in which they were required to continually justify and explain to others the need and significance of Aboriginal education. Participants indicated frequent instances where they or someone they knew (for example, a colleague or student) experienced isolation and alienation as a result of working or learning in an environment that continues to disregard and misrepresent Indigenous values, cultures and history at both explicit and tacit levels. Resistance to Aboriginal education remains a challenge that Aboriginal education leads and their allies continue to confront.

If the strategies, activities, and outcomes of the Framework are to be authentically achieved, it is necessary that Aboriginal perspectives be more widely funded, promoted, and embedded in school board governing structures, policies, and associated procedures. Educational stakeholders at all levels of governance need to take responsibility to address and ultimately

eliminate systemic barriers to education that continue to negatively affect the educational experiences of Indigenous students. Further exploration is required into what material entities need to assemble in order for organizational change to manifest. A more concentrated exploration into the range of social forces and materials implicated in bringing forth structural transition is needed. Such efforts include examining the situations and environments where Indigenous perspectives, values, knowledge, and expertise are most valued and impactful and what spaces they are most often ignored and undermined. Addressing the funding gap for First Nation students attending school on reserve is one place to begin. While there have been promising signs of change in recent years, the effects of inequities in funding felt by students attending reserve schools continues to persist. Government bureaucracy can be largely attributed to the growing funding disparities in Ontario between provincial and reserve schools. Concerns over accountability, miscommunication, and governance problems were identified by participants as contributing factors to the disparities in educational outcomes between provincial and reserve schools. Regardless of whether the issue being discussed is inequities in funding or student achievement, the point here is not to get caught up placing blame at who or what is at fault. It is important instead to observe the effects of a lack of resources first-hand—lower graduation rates, children not school-ready, occupational burnout, high rates of suicide, alienation, racist stereotyping—and consider, firstly, what education for equity and social justice looks like if it is approached sociomaterially, and secondly, how can it be promoted.

Ensuring there is representation from local First Nations at the school board trustee level is one way of moving closer toward the promise of an equitable education. Trustees can provide an important link between local communities and the school board, bringing the issues and concerns of their community members to board discussions and decision making. Although

trustees do not have individual authority, they do have an important role to play as members of the board, serving as a linchpin between the school board and community residents.

Restructuring the review and negotiation process of tuition agreements for on-reserve students attending Ontario provincial public schools is another way to move toward narrowing the divide between First Nation communities and provincial schools. According to Bains (2014), approximately 40 percent of all students who live on reserve attend an elementary or high school off reserve. First Nations students attend provincial public schools for a number of reasons, including the fact that not all First Nations communities have an elementary or secondary school on reserve. Some participants remarked how discussions around tuition agreements can be stressful, leaving some First Nation communities feeling frustrated and excluded.

Historically, the negotiation of tuition agreements between school boards and First Nation communities has been fraught with tension for a number of reasons, including a lack of monitoring from provincial and federal departments and overcharging discrepancies in what First Nations should be charged and what they are actually being charged for tuition fees, as well as the fact that the very foundation of First Nation tuition agreements are rooted heavily in colonial policy and processes dating back to the educational commitments First Nations people were promised in the treaties (Bains, 2014; Carr-Stewart & Steeves, 2009). To alleviate some of the misunderstanding that still exists, it is important that the process of negotiating an education agreement remain transparent and duly monitored to ensure First Nations communities are charged tuition fees at an appropriate level. The Department of Indigenous Affairs and Northern Development Canada has a particular responsibility to monitor these agreements, since it is responsible for providing education services and funding for First Nations students on reserve. Moreover, both sides of the negotiation table require formal educational training to ensure they

have the capacity to negotiate an education agreement that meets the needs of First Nation students in an equitable manner. Regional Aboriginal groups such as the Chiefs of Ontario have hosted information sessions across the province of Ontario to educate First Nation communities on what to expect during negotiation meetings with school boards (Bains, 2014). These informational sessions need to continue and be made accessible in a variety of venues and formats.

Another suggestion addresses the need for continuing leadership on Aboriginal education for the various branches of the Ministry and for other ministries, school board, and other education stakeholders in Ontario. Communicated consistently by all participants was how the provision of professional development was sorely needed for all staff—educators, principals, senior leadership, secretaries, janitors, educational assistants, attendance officers, librarians and so on. While Aboriginal education leads do their best in delivering appropriate cultural awareness training, many of them acknowledged that they were only able to scratch the surface. Building educational leadership capacity and coordination in order for systemic change to occur and be sustained is most easily facilitated through preservice education programs, ongoing professional development opportunities, and by inviting Aboriginal community members to facilitate and participate in teaching and learning opportunities within schools, bearing in mind the need to offer appropriate compensation for their time and sharing of knowledge. As Regan (2010) remarks “...settlers cannot just theorize about decolonizing and liberatory struggle: we must experience it, beginning with ourselves as individuals, and then as morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society” (pp.23-24). The creation of a decolonizing, transformative education environment can only begin when the Ministry, school boards, and schools take the initiative to change the physical and social environment of school

classrooms, meeting spaces, staff rooms, school board offices, and so on, to honour and validate Aboriginal people, culture, and knowledge.

**Policy level.** Considering this important juncture of where the Framework is at in its implementation, it is essential to discuss how the implementation activities and outcomes will be monitored and adapted moving forward to reflect learnings by the Ministry, boards, schools, FNMI partners, and key educational stakeholders. The Ministry pronounces in their 2014 Implementation Plan that they will be releasing the third progress report on Framework implementation in 2016, which will address ongoing progress made in implementation based on the ten performance measures, progress made in reducing gaps in student achievement, and progress made in developing indicators for assessing the self-esteem and well-being of Aboriginal students.

Additionally, the Implementation Plan outlines the Ministry's promise to calculate a five-year baseline graduation rate for self-identified Aboriginal students and a commitment to monitoring progress against this baseline in future years (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014). Though these evaluative measures are consistent with the 2007 policy directive and its original goals and projected outcomes, I remain skeptical as to whether these are the kinds of evaluative measures that should be prioritized and privileged. The findings from this study show that relying heavily on baseline data about student achievement and well-being as a measure for improvement does not provide a comprehensive picture of how the province is doing in providing increased opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and issue resolution. Nor does such data demonstrate how students themselves identify improved student achievement and engagement. Rather, what emerges is a fragmented perspective of what it means to improve education outcomes for FNMI students. One has to wonder what kind of progress can truly be

made when a single policy exacerbates the issue of achievement without looking at the broader context within which FNMI students are required to perform. The downfall of the Framework is that it ignores the bigger picture. The Framework responds too narrowly to a piece of the problem, reactively responding rather than proactively assembling a network of practices to improve education outcomes of FNMI students.

Advancing the goals of the Aboriginal education strategy requires ongoing evaluation and revision of the policy Framework in a manner that enables all provincial school boards to outline particular strategies that reflect their local circumstances. Just as school boards were encouraged to develop policies for voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification, I similarly suggest that the Ministry direct all provincial school boards to develop a five year Aboriginal education investment plan where boards are required to outline a work plan, approach, and timeline to identify how they plan to continue building educational leadership, capacity, and coordination within the arena of Aboriginal education. The emphasis should remain on identifying innovative and impactful ways to raise cultural awareness levels of all students, school board staff, and elected trustees and additionally expand focus to encouraging boards to develop policy and procedures for teacher/staff self-identification, including outlining specifically why and how collected data would be used. Across the four school boards involved in this study, staff self-identification was identified as not consistently taken up. There is merit in school boards exploring this issue further. Creating space for Aboriginal staff to self-identify serves to change the social and cultural environment to reflect and value Aboriginal presence at the school and administration level.

I also recommend that each provincial school board be paired with a sister board in their local geographic area to strengthen collaboration efforts and to serve as an added accountability

mechanism for future implementation of the Framework. One of my participants discussed how her board had established a joint committee with a nearby board and that it had served useful in the planning of initiatives and enabled community members and support agencies to be involved and provide guidance without being pulled in a number of directions. I would additionally suggest that these joint committees include representation from senior students. Lacking from the Framework and subsequent progress reports are the perspectives held by Aboriginal students concerning their stances on what it means to improve education outcomes of Aboriginal students. The absence of their voice is notable given that this policy directive is concerned with improving student achievement and engagement *for* FNMI students. The establishment of such a unique professional network would alleviate some of the burden that board-designated Aboriginal education leads expressed feeling in their professional roles. Students would be able to share their experiences and viewpoints in a space where they can meaningfully impact growth and change, and boards would be able to identify and share with each other promising practices and resources on a more regular basis, as well as discuss opportunities for data use and data sharing with the intention of maintaining high levels of public confidence.

**School board level.** Lastly, it is necessary that school boards have supports and mechanisms in place to attend to the compassion fatigue and work intensification that many participants described at one point or another during the time they served in the lead position. All of the leads I spoke with identified challenges in workload balance, admitting that the course of their professional responsibilities often spilled over into their evenings and weekends. Increased staffing would alleviate some of the workload imbalances that were described. Delegating Aboriginal education responsibilities across senior administrator portfolios would also ease the burden of responsibility that Aboriginal education leads are faced with and would exemplify the

key message that advocates in Aboriginal education have been attempting to communicate for decades—that the enactment of Aboriginal education is not the concern of one individual but the responsibility of all.

I also recommend that school boards take initiative to identify effective strategies to reduce, mitigate, and prevent compassion fatigue for board-designated Aboriginal education leads. The topic of compassion fatigue can be addressed at a staff meeting, through professional development sessions, or by offering counselling as part of an employee’s benefits package and encouraging employees to use the service. Compassion fatigue is an occupational hazard but one that can be proactively addressed and prevented by attending to workplace conditions and ensuring all staff have access to high quality training on topics related to trauma informed care.

## **Conclusion**

In the first chapter of this dissertation, I stated that the purpose of this study was to make visible how certain constructions of achievement become legitimated and perpetuated through educational policy and practices concerning FNMI students. I wondered what impact these constructions have had on FNMI students; how these constructions might influence how teachers and administrators enact Aboriginal educational policy; and how such constructions might affect the quality and quantity of resources delegated to local and provincial Aboriginal education projects and initiatives.

Admittedly, at the beginning of this study, I underestimated the impact materiality can have on how policy is storied and enacted. Prior to learning about sociomaterial perspectives, I viewed humans and objects as separate entities that interact and can develop connections, but not to such an extent that they act upon one another in ways that can transform everyday educational practices and policies. I spent more of my time trying to understand human action and



consciousness, including my own. Working in Indigenous education, I tried to understand another's decision to bypass or altogether avoid particular learning opportunities situated on increasing one's cultural competency. In moments of uncertainty, I asked myself why I ought to continue this work and when feeling discouraged or lost, I marveled at how others maintained their commitments to Aboriginal education and improvement despite facing adversity.

In my attempts to understand, learn, and grow as an individual and as an educator, I neglected to consider the performative nature of material things, bodies, and texts. I never considered the capability of these things to invite, ignore, negotiate, exclude, regulate, and circulate particular forms of participation and position different forms of knowledge in certain ways (Fenwick, 2014a). Initially, it was difficult for me to comprehend that I was being held by forces that were not always of my own making. It was unsettling to know that my actions were not being carried out under the full control of my consciousness (Latour, 2005). Gradually however, I found solace in this new realization. The initial powerlessness and ineffectiveness that I had assumed was entirely a result of my own inadequacies, diminished. I used this new way of seeing and being in the world as a means of observing and better understanding how materiality influences the conceptualization, enactment, and outcome of policies, processes, and practices in Indigenous education. Through the stories shared by my participants, I have begun to recognize the heterogeneity of actors working on, with, and against one another, spurring numerous networks to emerge. Hearing how participants navigated these networks enabled me to see what things and people do under different circumstances so as to better understand how and why people communicate and act in particular ways (Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011).

When working from a sociomaterial approach, it is important to emphasize that the aim is not to “define what is or prescribe what should be, but to follow closely what emerges through

processes of ‘mattering’, that is, processes by which things and possibilities are continually brought into being and into relationships” (Fenwick, 2014b, p.49 ) Described by Fenwick, Edwards, & Sawchuk, 2011 as a “look-down” approach (pp.123-124), the intention is not to separate human and non-human entities into particular groups for the purposes of assigning categories. Sociomaterial approaches like ANT are interested in understanding how the social and the material are “inextricably related” (Orlikowski, 2007, p. 1437): how networks become assembled and how they expand, shrink, evolve, and change to become a network of coordinated things and actions.

Pursuing an ANT informed study has enabled me to move beyond rigid boundaries and expectations of what categorizes achievement toward a conceptualization of achievement as a dynamic entity performed into existence through a web of social and material relations. It is hoped that this research had led the reader to better recognize the ebbs and flows in how Indigenous educational policy is enacted and has demonstrated opportunities for interrupting and weakening those assemblages that continue to perpetuate oppressive ideologies and behaviours. The nature of policy enactment is contingent, dynamic, multiple, and indeterminate. Certain practices, belief systems, and processes become entrenched as matters of fact (Latour, 2005) because they are assumed by education professionals to be decided, certain, and settled. However, these knowledges and practices may not be acting in the way that we intend and as such can be thought of as matters of concern (Latour, 2005). Sociomaterial analyses open new directions and vocabularies for interrogating what has been taken to be the problem of Aboriginal student achievement. The findings I have presented make visible how material entities manage to hold together, however temporarily, to produce particular actions of policy enactment, and by extension, understandings of what is and is not achievement. Such actions are

multifaceted and constantly shifting, producing both productive and destructive effects, sometimes concurrently, within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario.

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## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Email Sample Copy of Script for Recruitment**

Subject Line: Invitation to participate in research

You are being invited to participate in a study that Sarah Burm, a doctoral student in the Faculty of Education at Western University is conducting. Her research is examining how educators describe and understand their relationship to the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are currently holding or have previously held a position within a provincially funded school board in Ontario that provides appropriate services and supports to FNMI students and/or classroom educators in the area of Aboriginal education.

Briefly, the study involves participating in an individual interview regarding your current or previous position with an Ontario school board and the student population your board serves. Questions concerning the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework and how it informs your work will be asked. These questions will be provided to you prior to the interview. During the interview you will also be invited to share visual, written, and/or physical artefacts that are significant or representative of your professional practice. It is anticipated that the interview will take approximately one hour and will take place at your work or an alternative location of your choice. Please see the letter of information attached to this study for more information concerning this research study.

If you would like more information on this study contact the researcher at the contact information given below.

Sarah Burm

Phone: [REDACTED]

Email: [REDACTED]

## **Appendix B**

### **Interview Guide Questions for Interviews with Educators**

1. Demographic/background of participants
  - a. Years of experience
  - b. Grades/subjects taught
  - c. Involvement in school activities
  - d. Ancestral background
2. What is currently /was your role within the school board?
3. How did you come to this position?
4. Describe the student population of the area your school board serves
5. Were there specific professional or personal experiences that influenced your decision to take/stay in/leave this role?
6. How is/was Aboriginal Education defined within the context of your school board? What is/was the ultimate goal?
7. How would you describe your relationship to the FNMI Policy Framework? How is your work informed or influenced by this policy directive?
8. Have you found you act or understand your work in particular ways as a result of the Framework?
9. How is/was your school board cooperating and partnering with FNMI families, communities, and organizations to increase the local capacity of your students and additionally contribute to the education of school board staff, teachers, and administrators?

10. Have school board developed programs, services, and resources created and improved academic achievement and engagement for FNMI students? Do these initiatives reflect Aboriginal ways of learning and cultural perspectives of local FNMI families and communities?
11. How is Aboriginal student achievement and engagement being measured in your board? By whom? For whom?
12. Is there increased satisfaction and collaboration among educators and FNMI families, communities, and organizations in your school board? What has been the response?
13. What are the operational or system wide challenges/tensions to the work that you do?
14. What does a board that does Aboriginal Education well look like?
15. What do you think is the reason why some educators make more of an effort to build their cultural competency on issues related to and affecting Aboriginal students than others?
16. What does it mean to decolonize the culture of schooling for Aboriginal students and their families? (What does it look like/include/sound like/feel like?)
17. What affect has being in this position had on your own professional identity and your understanding of Aboriginal Education?
18. What would you like to see change/happen/stay the same in your school board concerning Aboriginal education? (i.e. professional development and mentoring opportunities, relationships with staff, expectations of staff and students, changes to school policy, etc)



## **Appendix C**

### **Letter of Information for Participants**

**Project Title:** Tracing the strategic and relational practices of the Ontario FNMI Policy Framework through the stories told by educators

#### **Principal Investigator:**

Sarah Burm, PhD Candidate, Western University

#### **1. Invitation to Participate**

My name is Sarah Burm and I am a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. I am currently conducting research into how educators describe and understand their relationship to the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework within the context of Aboriginal education in Ontario. You are being invited to participate in this research study because you are currently holding or have previously held a position within a provincially funded school board in Ontario that provides appropriate services and supports to FNMI students and/or classroom educators in the area of Aboriginal education.

#### **2. Purpose of the Letter**

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with important information required for you to make an informed decision regarding participation in this research study.

#### **3. Purpose of this Study**

The purpose of this study is to dig deeper into how educators understand, enact and translate the narratives being told through educational policy and processes concerning Aboriginal students. By critically examining these narratives, it is my hope to increase the capacity of educators to respond to the learning and cultural needs of Aboriginal students in the province of Ontario.

#### **4. Inclusion Criteria**

Five to eight male and female individuals who are currently working or have previously worked in positions within a provincially funded school board in Ontario that are aimed at providing appropriate services and supports to FNMI students and raising classroom educators cultural competency through appropriate training and professional development. These roles may include, but are not limited to, being designated as the Aboriginal liaison or coordinator for their school board, or being assigned as a FNMI student work study teacher by their board to work in classrooms to capture and understand student activity within specific classroom contexts. Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal individuals are welcomed to participate.

#### **5. Exclusion Criteria**

Individuals who are currently working as a classroom educator within a provincial school board without a designated focus on FNMI student experiences are not eligible to participate in this study. As well, educators who are currently working at a federally funded community school on reserve are not eligible to participate in this study.

#### **6. Study Procedures**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in an individual interview. I will be audio-taping the entire interview and I will be transcribing the information collected. If you prefer that I don't audio record portions of the interview or none of the interview at all, but would still like to participate, then these accommodations can be made. I recognize that you will have your own, unique experiences to share, and I want to ensure that there is opportunity for you to speak freely and openly about your professional experiences. I will begin by asking a few broad, open-ended questions regarding your current or previous position with an Ontario school board and the student population your board serves. I will then

ask you questions concerning the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework and how it informs your work. These questions will be provided to you prior to the interview. During the interview you will also be invited to share visual, written, and/or physical artefacts that are significant or representative of your professional practice. These can include but are not limited to drawings, art pieces, photographs, videos, journal entries, letters, emails, and annual reports. With your permission, participants permission I may photograph artefacts for use in the results portion of this study. It is anticipated that the interviews will take approximately one hour and will take place at your work or an alternative location of your choice. For those individuals who are currently employed within their school board in an Aboriginal lead position. I will seek permission to conduct direct observations to help me deepen my understanding of how participants, experience, live, and tell about their work both in relation to the FNMI Policy Framework and within the particularities of the professional context they are working in.

### **7. Possible Risks and Harms**

There are no known or anticipated risks or discomforts associated with participating in this study.

### **8. Possible Benefits**

The possible benefits to participants may be an increase in their professional capacity in responding to the learning and cultural needs of Aboriginal students, their families, and communities. The possible benefits to society may be generating new knowledge and understanding of issues relevant to Canada's Aboriginal Peoples. My research aims to create a decolonizing, transformative space where counter narratives can be told and heard from the perspectives of the participants themselves.

## **9. Compensation**

A \$25.00 gift card to Chapters will be provided for your participation in this study.

## **10. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your employment status.

## **11. Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. In order to protect your confidentiality and anonymity in this study, all participant names and place locations will be removed from the interviews once collected. All electronic and audio files will be encrypted and stored in a password protected folder on a password protected computer on Western university's network drive. Written consent forms and other paper documents will be stored in a locked filing cabinet at Western University. Collected data will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. Following this period electronic files will be permanently erased and paper documents will be shredded. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed and then all digitally recorded interviews will be permanently erased. Data will be stored in password protected files. Access to the data will be restricted to me and my supervisory committee.

## **12. Contacts for Further Information**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact The Office of Research Ethics at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Sarah Burm or Dr. Kathy Hibbert at

[REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED] This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

### **13. Publication**

If the results of the study are published, your name will not be used. If you would like to receive a copy of any potential study results, please contact Sarah Burm at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]

### **14. Consent**

Written consent will be collected from participants' taking part in the study.

*This letter is yours to keep for future reference.*

**Consent Form**

**Project Title:** Tracing the strategic and relational practices of the Ontario FNMI Policy

Framework through the stories told by educators

**Study Investigator's Name:** Sarah Burm

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. I understand that participation in this study is voluntary and that I can refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on my employment status. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Participant's Name (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

Person Obtaining Informed Consent (please print):

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date:

\_\_\_\_\_

# Appendix D

## Ethics Approval Notice



Research Ethics

### Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Katelyn Hibbert  
**Department & Institution:** Education/Faculty of Education, Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 105816  
**Study Title:** A Narrative Inquiry into how the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework Works on and Through Educators Working in the Area of Aboriginal Education  
**Sponsor:**

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** November 14, 2014  
**NMREB Expiry Date:** December 31, 2015

**Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:**

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Recruitment Items	Email script for recruitment to be sent out to contact potential participants	2014/09/17
Instruments	interview guide that will be used during interviews with participants.	2014/09/16
Revised Letter of Information & Consent	pdf of letter of information	2014/10/27
Revised Western University Protocol	pdf of the entire revised Western protocol (clean version)	2014/10/27

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the NMREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000011

Ethics Officer,



Ethics Officer to Contact for Further Information

Erika Basile ebasile@uwo.ca	Grace Kelly grace.kelly@uwo.ca	Mina Mikhail mmikhail@uwo.ca	Vikki Tron vikki.tron@uwo.ca
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*This is an official document. Please retain the original in your files.*

## Curriculum Vitae

### Name

Sarah Burm

### Education

**Doctor of Philosophy:** Educational Studies, field of Curriculum Studies. Western University, Faculty of Education. Dissertation: *Exploring the complexity of policy enactment through stories: A sociomaterial informed study*. Supervisor: Dr. Kathy Hibbert, Ph.D.

**Master of Education:** Field of Curriculum Studies. (2012). Western University, Faculty of Education. Thesis: *Working toward transformation and change: Exploring non-Aboriginal teachers' experiences in facilitating and strengthening students' awareness of Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal perspectives*. Supervisor: Dr. Rosamund Stooke, Ph.D.

**Bachelor of Education:** (2008). University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education.

**Bachelor of Arts:** Honours Communication Studies with Co-operative Option. (2007). Wilfrid Laurier University. Faculty of Arts.

### Work Experience

**Research Associate** (2016-Present). Centre for Education Research & Innovation (CERI). Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.

**Research Associate** (2014-2015). The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH). *A Longitudinal Evaluation of the Fourth R Aboriginal Program: Exploring Culture and Healthy Relationships as Protective Factors in Aboriginal Adolescent Well-Being*

**Graduate Research Assistant** (2010-2015). Western University.

### Scholarships and Honours

2015 Ontario Graduate Scholarship \$15,000  
2014 Ontario Graduate Scholarship \$15,000  
2014 Western University Graduate Student Teaching Award  
2010 Omushkego Education Excellence Teaching Award

### Publications and Presentations

#### **Papers in Journals (Refereed)**

Crooks, C., Exner-Cortens, D., **Burm, S.**, Lapointe, A., & Chiodo, D. (*accepted*). Mentoring for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit adolescents: Promoting positive mental health. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*.

**Burm, S.** (2016). More than a social justice project: The continued road towards truth and reconciliation. *The First Peoples Child and Family Review*, 11(1), 49-54.

Burleigh, D., & **Burm, S.** (2013). Unpacking our white privilege: Reflecting on our teaching practice. *in education*, 19(2), 107-119.



## Professional Publications

**Burm, S.** (2016). Culturally responsive teaching: Our collective responsibility as treaty people. *Our Schools, Our Selves*, 25(2), 15-21.

Burleigh, D., & **Burm, S.** (2012). Teaching north of 50. *Education Forum* 38(2), 20-22.

## Newspaper Articles

**Burm, S.** (2015, March 5). Education conference explores legacy of residential schools. *Western News*. Retrieved from <http://news.westernu.ca/2015/03/debassige-education-conference-explores-legacy-residential-schools/>

## Presentations at Academic Conferences (Refereed)

**Burm, S.** (2016, May). "Implementing policy is very complicated:" Tracing the social and material forces influencing enactment of the Ontario FNMI Education Policy Framework. Paper presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). Calgary, AB.

**Burm, S.,** & Burleigh, D. (2016, May). *Stories of Practice: Untold Narratives of Teaching in Indigenous Education*. Paper presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). Calgary, AB.

Burleigh, D., & **Burm, S.** (2015, June). *Unpacking our white privilege: A narrative inquiry into the experiences and challenges of teaching and living in a northern Ontario First Nation community*. Paper presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). Ottawa, ON.

**Burm, S.,** & Burleigh, D. (2015, May). *Stories of practice: Untold narratives of teaching in Indigenous contexts*. Paper presentation at the Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI), Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA.

**Burm, S.** (2014, May). *Aboriginal students' stories of schooling*. Paper presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE). St. Catherines, ON.

**Burm, S.** & Burleigh, D. (2014, May). *Unpacking our white privilege: Reflecting on our teaching practice*. Paper presentation at the Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI), Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA.

**Burm, S.** & Hibbert, K. (2014, May). *Looking back to see our way forward: A critical review of narrative inquiry across the professions*. Paper presentation at the Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI), Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA.

**Burm, S.** & Burleigh, D. (2014, April). *An autoethnographic inquiry into the unspoken stories of our teaching practice*. Paper presentation at the International Society of Educational Biography (ISEB), Toronto, ON.

**Burm, S., MacQuarrie, B., Moylan, J., & Smallboy, G. (2013, October).** *Why it matters to us: Our collective journey towards truth and reconciliation.* Panel presentation at the Peace and Justice Studies Association Conference, Waterloo, ON.

**Burm, S. (2012, May).** *Working toward transformation and change: Exploring non-Aboriginal teachers' experiences facilitating and strengthening Aboriginal students' awareness of Aboriginal knowledge and Aboriginal perspectives.* Roundtable presentation at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), Waterloo, ON.

**Burm, S., & Burleigh, D. (2012, March).** *Unpacking our white privilege: Decolonizing our teaching practice.* Paper presentation at the Eighth Annual Aboriginal Storyteller's Conference, Buffalo, NY, USA.

**Burm, S. (2011, May).** *Drawing on tradition: Re-conceptualizing literacy instruction for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.* Paper presentation at the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC) Pre-conference. Fredericton, NB.

### **Teaching - Courses and Seminars**

Instructor for 5423 *Aboriginal Education: Toward a Decolonizing Pedagogy for Teachers* (Winter 2016; 2014-2015): Bachelor of Education course at Western University, Faculty of Education (~17 students). Role: developing syllabus, developing course material, developing and maintaining course website, teaching, grading assignments, responding to students' questions and concerns.

Teaching Assistant for 9576 *Narrative Inquiry: Teachers, Stories and Critical Pedagogy* (2013, Fall): Graduate course at Western University, Faculty of Education (~18 students). Role: assisting in the development of the syllabus, leading online discussions, grading assignments, responding to students' questions and concerns. Note: this course was taught online.

### **Teaching - Other**

Occasional Elementary Teacher (2012-2016): Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), London, ON

Student Mentor (2014-2015): CAMH Centre for Prevention Science, London, ON  
Role: Co-facilitate a Fourth R mentoring program for FNMI students in grades seven and eight, implement culturally responsive programming.

Teacher, TVDSB FNMI Summer Literacy Camp (2012-2015, summer): Three week literacy and cultural program for FNMI and non-FNMI students entering grades one through five. Role: implementing culturally responsive programming, organizing field trips and special guest visits, maintaining communication with parents/guardians, completing end of program report cards.

Grade Three Elementary Teacher (2008-2010): Attawapiskat First Nation, Attawapiskat, ON.

### **Academic Service**

Graduate Student Representative, *Western Education's Faculty Appointments Committee* (voted) (2015-2016)

Graduate Student Representative, *Western Education's Faculty Council* (voted) (2013-2014)

Graduate Student Mentor, *Western Education's Ph.D. Mentorship Program* (2013-2014)

Secretary, *Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC)* (2013)

Reviewer, *in education* (2013)

Graduate Student Representative, *Language & Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC)* (2012)

Symposium Committee Member, *Research in Education Symposium, Faculty of Education, Western University* (2011)

### **Professional Memberships**

Member, Canadian Association for Teacher Education (2013-2015)

Member, Canadian Association for Studies in Indigenous Education (2012-present)

Member, *Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada* (2012-2013)

Member, Ontario College of Teachers (2008-present)