

INDIGENOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS IN MAINSTREAM CHILD CARE

by

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ABSTRACT

Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Mainstream Child Care

Master of Arts, 2021

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This research is an interpretive qualitative study of 10 Indigenous early childhood educators in mainstream child care in Southern Ontario. The study explores the lived experiences of these Indigenous early childhood educators in mainstream child care. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, allowing the Indigenous early childhood educator to share their stories. Analysis of the participants' stories through the lens of circularity helped identify how Indigenous early childhood educators were making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy in mainstream child care. Critical reflection on the stories identified key findings: 1) The ethical space of engagement was employed in the making of space, 2) Relationships were built within the ethical space, 3) Land knowledge and engagement ensured the holding of the space, and 4) The spirit of the child was fostered within the ethical space through relationship and engagement. This study was conducted in the Indigenous research paradigm upholding relationality and relational accountability, employing a circularity in the analysis.

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I would like to acknowledge the Indigenous early childhood educators that participated in the research. The stories each one of you shared were from the heart. I have been transformed by your stories. I hope this research was able to capture the beauty of your practice and pedagogy. I will carry your stories with me till the end of time.

Chi miigwech to Tammy Johnston, Hopi Martin and Lori Huston, our paths intersected at the right time and I hope they continue to align.

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I am truly grateful for your support.

Miigwech.

DEDICATION



I would like to dedicate this research to my family. Your love enables me to reach for the stars and achieve my educational aspiration. Andrew, Owen and Lyla, you are my love and guiding light. Your patience and understanding made this journey possible. Owen and Lyla, always know you are my inspiration. Yes, we can

finally go on that long walk in the forest and while we're there, let me tell you a story...

To my parents, for your continuous support and encouragement. My constant quest for knowledge and learning stems from the curiosity and wonderment you fostered in me as a child. You made this research possible. To my brothers, Aaron, Ian and Eric, thanks for listening to my ramblings. Ian, thank you for the beautiful Four Medicines artwork.

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A special Chi Miigwech to the ten IECs who answered my call. I am forever grateful for your willingness to share your story. Each of you gave me a gift that I will treasure and carry to the end of my days. In return, I gift you this research.

Lastly, to all the IECs walking with children, may you continue to share the beauty of our ways.

To all my relations.

Miigwech.

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Introduction

I would like to begin this journey by acknowledging the history of the ancestral land I am living on while writing this research. I acknowledge the land and the ancestral relationship between the Anishinaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacies that created one of the oldest peace treaties on Turtle Land. Ryerson University is located within the territory of this original treaty, the Dish With One Spoon. The Dish With One Spoon is a sacred relationship between human beings and the life-giving Land. The treaty bounds the Anishinaabe, currently represented by the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation, and Haudenosaunee into a shared responsibility with Land.

I acknowledge Mother Earth, the creator of life. Miigwech, for your endless compassion and bounty. I acknowledge the Elders, knowledge holders and ancestors, past and present, who shared their teaching in the hope of guiding in a good way. Miigwech, for your endless guidance and light. I acknowledge all communities, Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers who have and continue to be invited in peace, friendship and respect into the Dish With One Spoon treaty. We are guests on this land, sharing a mutual obligation to respect, honour and sustain this space for all life, present and future.

I enter into this research in the spirit of the Dish With One Spoon, only taking what I need to sustain, leaving something for the next and respecting all relations within. Miigwech.

Indigenous Protocol of Place

In Indigenous axiology, it is essential to locate oneself in relation (Styres, 2019; Wilson, 2008). This is done through a formal positionality introduction. Positioning oneself is a fundamental principle in Indigeneity (Styres, 2019). It is a value-driven process centred around the concept of identity formation (Maraira & Silan, 2019). Its purpose is to establish the ethics or

morals guiding and informing the researcher's reality and knowledge (Mariara & Silan, 2019; Styres, 2019; Wilson, 2008). It connects "who we are in relation to what we know" (Styres, 2019, p.8). The process is analytical, reflective and expository. It tells the story of who we are.

By beginning with our positionality, our motives, intentions and subjectivities are defined. Epistemic perspectives are clearly identified (Styres, 2019). The cultural protocol allows us to reflect on our experiences, both culturally and geographically, that shape our knowledge (Mariara & Silan, 2019; Styres, 2019). It puts us in relation while establishing a relationship with the reader. Wilson (2008) states, "Relationality requires that you know a lot more about me before you can begin to understand my work." (p. 12). The cultural protocol of positionality allows the reader to understand your ontology, axiology and epistemology and how it has informed your reality while shaping your knowledge. The process of locating oneself places one into a reciprocal relationship (Styres, 2019). Positionality is fluid, and circular in nature. Our reality informs our knowledge, and our knowledge informs our reality. It is always moving, always in relation. Acknowledging our positions establishes our relationality and accountability to self, family, community and land (Mariara & Silan, 2019; Styres, 2019).

Traditionally, our positionality is presented when we introduce ourselves. Typically, we state our Indigenous name, our community and our Clan (Peggy Pitawanakwat, Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory, Manitoulin Island, personal communication, September 2017). We might mention our ancestors to establish a relationship/bloodline (Peggy Pitawanakwat, Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory, Manitoulin Island, personal communication September 2017). Our Indigenous name is our Spirit Name. It provides us with a sense of meaning and belonging. Naming our community establishes accountability. It locates us to a geographical location, and it is understood that land contains teachings. The teachings have shaped our

understandings and are the foundation of our knowledge. Naming our Clan outlines the role and responsibilities we have in our community to maintain its well-being. When we are engaged in critical thinking, we will explain our journey to this point in time and describe elements that have influenced our story. Through the retelling, we can define how our thinking was formed, how things came to be, the relationships that created our knowledge, and how we understand the world as it is. The only thing we know for certain in life is our story.

Social Location/Positionality

My name is Maya-Rose of the Crane Clan. I am Anishinaabe, tribally enrolled in the Chippewa Indian Tribe of Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. In Canada, I am Métis. I grew up where three Great Lakes Superior, Michigan and Huron meet. This is the land my ancestors lived on and where I was formed. This is the birthplace of my knowledge and teachings.

When I was born, there was no Anishinaabe Naming Ceremony available. It was illegal under the US federal legislation Circular No. 2970, for Native Americans to practice their traditional beliefs. My family wanted my spirit to walk with a Native name. I was given Maya after the Central American Maya civilization. Maya means knowledge. Rose was a gift. I have the great honour to be named after my great-grandmother. Rose means beauty. Knowledge Beauty is the name I walk with on Mother Earth. It is the name of my spirit. It is my identity.

I am the great-granddaughter of Rose Dake. My great-grandmother was a strong, educated woman who was known as a healer in her community. She was the night supervisor at a State Hospital. When she was a child, her community protected her from Indian boarding school by hiding her Chippewa identity. By doing so, she and her descendants could thrive. This act was not unusual at the time; communities protected members by claiming some were not "Indian," thus avoiding the reality of being Indian under United States of America government rule. The

loving act of denial allowed for members to pursue education, attain professional employment, allow for ownership of property, businesses and land. My family protected the original documents proving our Native identity, so in the future, when it was safe, all members could reclaim their identity. In the late 1960s, my great grandmother enrolled in the Chippewa Indian Tribe of Sault Ste. Marie. My generation is the first in three to be born tribally enrolled.

I am also the granddaughter of Emerald Paul LaBlance, a tribally enrolled member of the Chippewa Indian Tribe of Sault Ste Marie and a former council member of the Métis Nation. My grandfather was on the band council for the Woodland and the Southampton's Métis Association. He was honoured for his life's work. The LaBlance family owned a successful commercial fishing (est.1830s) and cannery business (est.1920s). The Canadian federal government in the early 1970s sponsored the company to relocate to Canada to establish a competitive fishing industry in Ontario. The business and all its family members relocated to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario. That is how my family came to be in Canada.

I am the daughter of Joe and Cathy LaBlance. My parents are known in their community for their kindness, compassion and generosity. I am the mother of Owen and Lyla-Rose.

I grew up knowing I was Native American and Métis. I know what it is to be an Indigenous child growing up in Northern Ontario. I fully understand why my Ancestors chose to hide their identity. As a child, I was bussed with the other Indigenous children to the nun ran Catholic elementary school. It was not a happy nor safe place for Indigenous children. The teachers did not inspire the love of learning. Instead, they instilled a sense of not belonging.

It was after school on the land with my family, that my love for learning was fostered. My parents would encourage me to wonder and question. My great-grandmother would always ask, "How do you know?" which would invite me to explain my thought process. She would ask

questions to help me connect ideas. Also, it was important in my family to understand perspective and humanity. The attainment of all knowledge was valued in my home. We were encouraged to rise above the challenges we faced in mainstream education for the pursuit of knowledge.

We lived our lives guided by the principles of love, honesty, truth, courage, humility, respect and wisdom. While my ancestors lived in secrecy, the Native way of being was kept and instilled in the children. My family had lost their ability to speak our language, perform our ceremonies and sing our songs, but what remained was the way of knowing and being.

My first teaching position was on our Tribal land. Elders and Knowledge Holders visited the centre regularly. Traditional Teaching were a part of the curriculum. Together the children and I learned Ojibwe. I recognized it immediately as the language I heard my Great Grandmother speak while she dreamt at night. I was eighteen when I spoke my first word, “Aanii.” As the word rolled off my tongue and rang in my ears, my Spirit sang. I understood the significance of the moment, for generations our language was spoke quietly, then secretly, eventually in the effort to protect the children not spoken at all. I was the first in generations to speak in the light of day.

During my first winter teaching, the Elders visited my classroom often to tell Stories. We would gather in a circle and be fully captivated. I recognized the Seven Grandfathers instantly. I knew my family’s ways was connected to this story. As I listened to the Elder, it felt like she was walking me home.

No words can fully describe how my heart felt as I reclaim our Knowledge and Stories. Since then, I have reclaimed many and I am always left speechless by the power residing within each. I can feel my heart ach a little less and my Spirit radiating within the Knowledge.

Overtime, I have been able to piece together the Teachings and Ceremonies that align with my families' ways of knowing and being. My Ancestors have waited patiently for this day. I am the seed they protected. I am the voice they could not speak. I am all their hopes and dreams. I am a part of the generation, looking back and picking up the Teaching, piecing them together. As I reclaim each one, I fill it with my hopes and dreams for the next generation. A generation living and growing within the beauty of our Knowledge.

I, like so many of my relatives, have achieved academic success in mainstream education. I have a diploma in early childhood education, a Bachelors degree and currently seeking a Masters of Arts degree in early childhood studies. It is the spirit within me that is continuously seeking knowledge. The knowledge based on the humanity teachings given to the Anishinaabe by Creator. My life's quest is based on the desire to answer the question, "How do we live well together?" This question guides my life and my research. The Indigenous thought of relationality intertwines life and research. Lived experiences influences my research and my research shapes my life. Life and research are in a reciprocal relationship. Creator has granted me the gift of walking with children in my quest for answers. Through their (child) teachings, I am able to begin to understand the full meaning of humanity.

I have been a teacher for twenty-five years. My identity as a Native American woman has informed my teaching practice. As I reflected on my career, I realize my practice has been influenced by my Indigenous way of knowing and being. My approach is founded on relationships (self, child, family, community, land and the more-than-human). I carry a relational Indigenous view everywhere I go.

As an Indigenous early childhood educator (IECE), I have walked with our youngest citizens. I love being on the land with children, showing them how we are interconnected and

fostering curiosity and wonderment of life. It is in the moments of awe that I can see the spirit of the child. It is the most amazing experience to see a child light up. I believe the Indigenous way of being and walking with children is beautiful.

I never talked about how my practice was informed by Indigenous Knowledge and ways of being; I just practiced it daily. Peers would praise my work and thought Reggio Emilia inspired me. I did not bother to correct them. However, with Idle No More's rise, I realized the importance of naming my pedagogy as Indigenous. I began to name my practice, and by doing so, I exposed myself. It was then my practice became scrutinized. Although my way of being with children never changed, the work that had once been praised work was now questioned or overlooked. The more I embraced my Indigenous pedagogy, the more I felt the colonial hierarchy of power within child care.

My master's research project is born out of this experience. When I began to claim my Indigenous pedagogy, I felt very alone. At times, it felt I was the only one walking the space between Indigenous and western ways of educating children. I knew I was not the only one on this journey, for the path was well worn. I decided then to seek out other IECs in mainstream child care and listen to their story. I wondered if they could bring their whole self to their classrooms, and if they did, how did they fair? How did their Indigenous ways of being and knowing influence their walk with children? Was their Indigenous way of walking with children embraced by their centres? What barriers did they have to overcome? I wanted to know if their story was similar to mine. I wondered how they were making space for Indigenous pedagogy, but more importantly, how did they hold it?

I understand how the decisions of my ancestors have influenced where I am today. I am the seed they protected. Their decision to protect enabled my grandparents and parents to thrive

in mainstream education; their love of learning was passed down to me. I learned to grow as a Native American within the colonial education system. Blossoming into an Indigenous educator working and resisting within the system. As an Indigenous educator, I have walked with children fostering a wonderment of this land. I share with them the teachings that have informed my identity and the knowledge that I view as beautiful. My hope for this research is to start a conversation on what it means to be an Indigenous ECE in mainstream child care while showing the beauty of Indigenous pedagogy.

CHAPTER 1. Illumination

Semah is always first.

Illumination



In my heart hand, I hold Semah, feeling the unconditional love flow. I fill it gently with goodness for this journey. A journey around the Circle. It is with respect and gratitude I take the first step into the Eastern Doorway. The East is where life begins. I come with a vision, an inspiration. To see the vision into reality, I come with a question. I ask...

Indigenous Relational Paradigm

A paradigm reflects the theories held around the construction of knowledge. It is the framework that underpins our beliefs about the nature of knowledge. A paradigm consists of assumptions, concepts and theories that collectively guide our thinking. Essentially it is a way of seeing the world, a worldview. A worldview is a standpoint that guides a state of mind in creating a specific reality. A research paradigm sits within the larger worldview.

A research paradigm is formed by our ontology, epistemology, axiology and methodology (Wilson, 2008). It influences the way we think about a topic, the way a particular problem exists within a worldview. It shapes how the phenomenon will be approached. Questions surrounding the phenomenon are constructed by our ideas and conceptions about the world. The beliefs held within a paradigm will influence the formation of the question being asked within the research. Therefore, the paradigm used in research influences how we see the phenomenon and how the question will be posed and answered. A research paradigm underpins

all the decisions regarding the inquiry, from the question to the methodology used to how data is collected and analyzed to how new knowledge is constructed and presented (Wilson, 2008).

This research is rooted in an Indigenous paradigm. Research grounded in this paradigm allows Indigenous people to raise their consciousness level while gaining insight into their worldview (Hodson, 2013; Wilson, 2008). An Indigenous paradigm embraces the belief that knowledge is relational (Hodson, 2013; Kovach, 2016; Styres, 2017; Wilson, 2008). Knowledge is created through the interconnection of all things: human, plant, animal, elements and matter. Research moves beyond the individual quest for knowledge into a collaborative relationship with all of creation (Hodson, 2013).

An Indigenous paradigm upholds the concept that knowledge is relational with the cosmos. Reality is created through relationships. Universal truths depend on the relationship one holds with the truth (Hodson, 2013; Wilson, 2008). Therefore, multiple realities and truths can be held simultaneously. This is similar to the post-modern perspective that truth is relative (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane & Muhamad, 2001). Truth and reality are dependent on the knower (Merriam et al., 2001). Our standpoint is determined by perspective. Perspective allows for many truths to be true simultaneously. In Indigenous thought being in relation creates reality. Relationships are the foundation of Indigenous knowledge. My parents often stated, "Reality (knowledge) depends on where you are standing." (Joseph and Catherine LaBlance, Chippewa Tribe of Sault Ste Marie, MI, personal communication). It is inconceivable to pass judgement on another's perspective, for they have forged their own relationships. A researcher has the responsibility to explain their relationships within the research to help explain their conclusions.

Indigenous research is the relationship between subjects, ideas, and concepts being investigated from the researcher's perspective. The researcher and research are the same

(Hodson, 2013). There is no space between the two. The study is within the researcher's life experience, and it is from their perspective knowledge is being shaped. Indigenous research embraces subjectivity. From an Indigenous standpoint, it is within subjectivity that reality is created and understood. According to an Indigenous paradigm, the relationships the researcher forms with all her relations while conducting the investigation results in a complete understanding of the topic. Indigenous research is a beautiful dance between the researcher, participants and all their relations in a spirituality, emotions, intellectual, and physical reality (Hodson, 2013; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). It is the movement of energy with and between that shifts the consciousness of how reality is re-expressed (Hodson, 2013). The Indigenous paradigm in research is based on aspects of relationality and relational accountability (Smith, 2012; Styres, 2017; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). It is grounded in the ethical stance of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kovach, 2016; Styres, 2017; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019).

In Indigenous worldviews, an entity exists in relation to something else (Wilson, 2008; Yunkaporta & Shillingworth, 2020). All things are related therefore relevant. This standpoint shapes our way of being/relating to the world. It places us in the space of self-in-relation. Indigenous epistemology is based on the concept that knowledge is developed through relationships' formation (Hodson, 2013; Smith, 2012; Styres, 2017; Wilson, 2008). Through strengthening the relation, space is reduced, and deeper knowledge is gained. In Indigenous research, the relational connections are being examined as we pull them closer to ourselves. The researcher is an active agent inseparable from the subject/topic. Objectivity is nonexistent; in this subjectivity makes us accountable to all our relationships that have been formed in our quest for understanding reality.

Relational Accountability

It is the relational process that makes us accountable for our relations (Yunaporta & Shillingworth, 2020). Relational accountability is relationality in practice. Indigenous research is accountable to all our relations. If reliability and validity are the way the western positivist paradigm evaluates research, then relational accountability is equivalent in the Indigenous paradigm. The research data must be relational and answer how it relates to the world and the relationship forged in the process (Wilson, 2008). By building relationships through the act of researching, the researcher becomes situated into a community. It is self-in-relation to the community that claims integrity in the research (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

Knowledge is the interpretation of relationships in this paradigm. Thus, research is a network between the community, participants, and researchers as they gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon. Interpreting relationships makes knowledge come to light and live. However, it is the actual application in lived experience that breaths life into it. Relational accountability ensures research benefits the community (Hodson, 2013; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019).

The Four R's: Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, Responsibility

The spirit of relationality and relational accountability is the philosophical foundation of Indigenous methodology (Kovach, 2016). The ethical guide for Indigenous methodology is influenced by respect, responsibility, relevance and reciprocity (Archibald, Lee-Morgan & De Santolo, 2019; Kovach, 2016). It is the responsibility of the researcher that all four elements are present in the research.

The foundation of any relationship is built on respect. It is through respect relationships and humanity can flourish (Smith, 2012). Respect embodies the concepts of balance and

harmony (Smith, 2012). It is a reciprocal relationship that is expressed through social conduct (Smith, 2012). The researcher is responsible for maintaining respectful relationships throughout the research process. This includes Indigenous local protocols, and knowledges are respected. Another aspect of respect is researching with the heart. To ensure the research is balanced and in harmony with all its relations, a researcher continually 'checking their heart' to ensure good relationship building motives. The process of diving deeper into understanding requires the researcher to listen with their heart while engaging in relationships (Sumida Huaman & Martin, 2020).

The researcher's responsibility is to learn and practice local protocols (Sumida Huaman & Martin, 2020; Wilson, 2008). The researcher is responsible for ensuring that protocols are followed with honesty and humility, upholding respect for Indigenous knowledges (Archibald, 2020; Wilson, 2008). Being in and maintaining reciprocal relationships is the responsibility of the researcher (Wilson, 2008).

The research must be relevant to Indigenous peoples (Hodson, 2013; Kovach, 2016; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). The research must live in the Indigenous lived experience and benefit the Indigenous community. The process of building relationships with community members ensures the researcher learns what research is useful and relevant.

Reciprocity is the ethics of relationality and informs accountability. An Indigenous relationship is based on reciprocity, giving and receiving. The continual cycle of giving and receiving establishes a strong relationship between and with two entities. This means the researcher is responsible for nourishing and maintaining the relationship with the community and participants. The community, participants and the researcher are in a relationship that requires

respect, trust, accountability and responsibility (Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019). Reciprocity in research can look like ongoing communication, valuing participants as equal partners in the research, and ensuring community members are present when the research is presented (Smith, 2012). The research gives back to the community to ensure the growth of the community.

Circularity Framework

I am Anishinaabe; I must look towards my culture for a framework that supports my critical thinking in research. As a scholar, I look to the Anishinaabe academic community for guidance. The Anishinaabe worldview as wholistic has been introduced and used by many in the academy before me (Absolon, 2016; Benton-Banai, 1988; Hodson, 2013; Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017). Each one is guided by a 360-degree lens developed by our ancestors, our spirituality, and the land since time immemorial. When engaging in circular thought, we are upholding our worldview of holism.

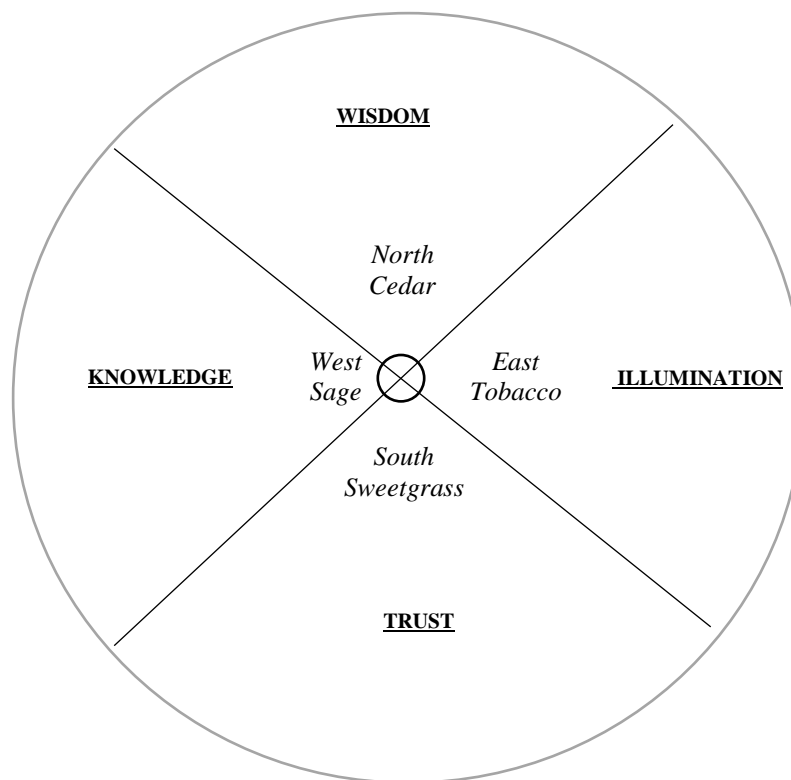
The Circle is never-ending; it has no beginning or end. The Medicine Wheel with Four Directions is the symbol used for balance and wholeness within our culture. In Anishinaabe, it is the Seven Grandfathers who enlighten the People about the powers of each direction. Each direction is multifaceted. Through journeying around the Circle, we begin to understand the universe is bigger than it seems.

Each element within the Circle is connected and moves fluidly between each other. It is the continuous circling that strengthens the space between elements. An elemental layer that might have been hidden could light upon the third passing, and a new understanding arises. With each turn, the relationship raises consciousness. The Circle reminds us of how everything is connected, intertwined, and knotted (Styres, 2017). Thought, life and the universe are non-linear.

It is a three-dimensional circle, webbed with a purpose. It is within the circular that critical thinking entwines and leads to transformation. The transformation creates new Knowledge or a new set of relationships.

Four interconnected directions make up the circularity framework (Absolon, 2016). Each direction must be attended to in order to maintain balance within the whole. This research's four directions are illumination, trust, knowledge, and wisdom, as seen in Figure I. Styres' (2017) research exploring Land-centred Indigenous philosophies inspired the use of these directions.

Figure 1: Research Medicine Wheel (Styres, 2017)



We enter from the East with the rising sun through the spiritual door of Illumination. Semeh is always given first. This part of the Medicine Wheel framework of research is named Illumination for it is where the researcher spiritually envisions something that may come in the future (Styres, 2017). It is the birth of a possibility, an inspiration. The inspiration rooted in the

Indigenous lived experience. The quest is to bring harmony or balance to a topic and improve the life of Indigenous people. The researcher expresses their current relationship with the subject by describing what they see from their position.

Journeying clockwise, we enter the emotional southern door of Trust (Styres, 2017). Sweetgrass is gifted as we enter into a reciprocal relationship. A cycle within itself, life's give and take relationship. "...honor our responsibilities for all we have been given, for all that we have taken." (Kimmerer, 2013, p.384). Relationships are founded on trust, responsibility and accountability (Styres, 2017; Wilson, 2008). A trusting relationship will allow the sharing of ideas, experiences and knowledges. It is this sharing that becomes our data. It is gifted to the researcher, with the understanding that she is responsible for the relationship and has an obligation to the community (Wilson, 2008).

The cognitive western door of knowledge is next. It is in this space where collective and individual knowledge is developed (Styres, 2017). The analysis of the relationship to all relations is critically reflected upon until you reach a new understanding or awareness (Absolon, 2016; Wilson, 2008). The researcher is in a place where their relationship with ideas will allow them to see new connections. In Anishinaabe thought, knowledge is not discovered but created through a new set of relationships. Looking twice ensures the connections are true (Absolon, 2016).

The northern direction is last. It represents the physical. Here, the original vision is actualized through action and Wisdom (Styres, 2017; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous research should always benefit the real lives of people. This is where thought becomes a reality completing the circular journey of the research.

Inspiration/ Research Purpose

In response to Indian residential schools, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) recommended 94 calls to action to mend the relationship between Indigenous and Canadian people. The TRC had a specific call to action for the early years sector. The twelfth call to action stated, "We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families." (TRC, 2015, p. 2). Since the report was made public in 2015, the federal and provincial governments have pledged to expand Aboriginal Head Start, invest in Indigenous early learning centres and create an Indigenous early learning framework.

The federal government released the National Indigenous ELCC framework in 2018, with a commitment of \$1.7 billion in new funding over ten years to expand the ELCC program for all Indigenous children (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018). The ELCC framework outlines a vision and principles for establishing high-quality early learning and child care programming in Canada. The initiatives are to be Indigenous-led and determined by First Nation, Inuit and the Métis Nation's priorities.

This project was undertaken in Ontario. The Ontario provincial budget of 2019 allocated \$35 million to support off-reserve Indigenous-led child care and early years programming (Ministry of Education, 2019). There are 27 Indigenous-led child care centres throughout the province of Ontario and 65 EarlyON programs offering Indigenous programming (Ministry of Education, 2020).

In 2020, provincial funding for the Centres of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care ended, resulting in the closure of the Indigenous Centre of Excellence. The Centres of Excellence were a part of Ontario's action plan under the Canada-Ontario Early Learning and Child Care

Agreement (Ministry of Education, 2020). Three centres, Provincial, Francophone and Indigenous, were established to support professional learning. One of the mandates for the Centres were to support the implementation of *How Does Learning Happen? Ontario's Pedagogy for the Early Years* (HDLH) (2014), while promoting pedagogical approaches and practices within the early years (Ministry of Education, 2020). The Indigenous Centre of Excellence promoted Indigenous pedagogy, answering the TRC's call to action for culturally appropriate early childhood programming (Indigenous Centre of Excellence, 2020). Although the funding of the Centres of Excellence funding ended, the provincial government announced in the 2020-21 budget investment in Indigenous professional learning opportunities (Ministry of Education, 2020). The focus of Indigenous professional learning is to support Indigenous professionals working within Indigenous child care centres.

The federal and provincial governments are taking financial steps towards answering the TRC calls to action. However, a broader approach is necessary to fully achieve culturally appropriate early childhood programming within the early years sector. The Canadian census calculated 8.7% of the Aboriginal population is below the age of 4 years old (Statistics Canada, 2016). The Aboriginal Children's Survey of 2006 indicated 48% of Indigenous children under the age of 6, excluding reserves, received regular child care in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2008). Only 13% received child care that promoted First Nation, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) traditional cultural values and customs (Statistics Canada, 2008). According to the 2011 AFN School Survey Results, 76% of First Nation children living on reserves in Ontario had no access to licensed child care (Assembly of First Nations, 2012). The percentage of Métis children in child care was 51%, with only 7% receiving culturally appropriate early childhood programming (Statistics Canada, 2008). There is a gap between the Indigenous children's population in child

care and those receiving culturally appropriate early childhood programs. Given the gap, it is safe to assume that many Indigenous children are in mainstream child care; therefore, to truly provide culturally appropriate early childhood programming for Indigenous children, mainstream child care must step up their effort to answer the call.

The Ministry of Education regulates the Ontario child care sector. In the Child Care and Early Years Act of 2014, a provincial pedagogical framework was mandated. HDLH (2014) is the pedagogical framework guiding mainstream and Indigenous child care and family programs. The document influences the pedagogy and programs offered in child care. It is a resource that helps shape the views of the child and the role of the educator and families (Ministry of Education, 2014). The document embraces a holistic approach to child development. Four Foundations, Well-being, Belonging, Expression and Engagement, represent the view of the whole child. The four foundations are depicted through the use of a circle, similar to the Medicine Wheel.

Other than the circular representation, Indigenous knowledge and ways of being are lacking within the pedagogical framework. The document mentions FNMI twice, both times stating the importance of language (Ministry of Education, 2014). The document was published a year prior to the release of the TRC report, however, in the five years since no amendments have been made to the document regarding Indigenous ways of being with children. This is a missed opportunity.

Indigenous child cares across the province are required to use the pedagogical framework within their programming. There have been attempts by Indigenous organizations such as the Métis Early Learning and Child Care and the Indigenous Centre of Excellence to align corresponding elements within the document to Indigenous knowledge systems (S. Murphy,

manager of Indigenous Centre of Excellence, personal communication, January 2020, A. Pont-Shanks, manager of Métis Nation of Ontario Early Learning and Child Care, personal communication, July 2020). In the winter of 2020, I was invited by the Indigenous Centre of Excellence to a working session on an Indigenous HDLH to help create content for a website. The website was to be released in the Spring of 2020, however, the Centre closed before its release. Unfortunately, to date, an Indigenous interpretation of the document has yet to be released.

HDLH privileges the Eurocentric knowledge system. Moss (2017) reminds us that the dominant discourse in early childhood education is not the only one, "there are alternatives that are varied, vibrant and vocal." (p. 1). The HDLH pedagogy invites early childhood educators to critically reflect on their child care practices (Ministry of Education, 2014). As an Indigenous Early Childhood Educator (IECE), I am interested in the intersection between Indigenous pedagogy and HDLH. I think the space between Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledges on children, curriculum and pedagogy offers an opportunity to reimagine what it means to work/walk with children.

I believe many Indigenous educators are practicing and voicing alternative discourses. Moss (2017) asserts the predicament lays within the dominant discourse silencing of the otherness. The unwillingness to listen is a barrier in realizing alternative ways of being (Moss, 2017). It is also a barrier to reconciliation within the early childhood sector and answering the calls for culturally appropriate early childhood education for all Indigenous children.

The intersection between Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge is full of alternative possibilities. A place to start investigating the intersection is through the Indigenous educators in mainstream child care. A majority of Indigenous educators are practicing in mainstream

education. According to Statistics Canada (2016), there are approximately 5,000 Indigenous people in Ontario's education and teaching field. The College of Early Childhood Educators of Ontario's annual report of 2018-19 indicated 562 individuals who self-identified as Indigenous (College of Early Childhood Educators, 2019, p.11). The College notes a low (1.03%) self-identification rate.

It is worth noting at this point self-identification has a complex history. Canada's government has defined and redefine Indigenous identity through revisions to the Indian Act (Educational Policy Institute, 2008). The Indian Act granted some Indigenous people status while disenfranchising others, resulting in many Indigenous people questioning how to define their identity under the law. The Canadian government's colonial assimilation strategies have caused identified Indigenous individuals great harm (Indian residential schools, the sixties scoop, and FNMI children's overrepresentation in the child welfare system). Considering the history, some Indigenous people find it problematic to self-identify. Therefore, there is a high probability that the actual numbers of IECs in Ontario is higher.

IECs, self-identified or not, are the ones walking between two knowledge systems. Creating ethical spaces within colonial educational institutions for themselves, the children in their care, and their ways of being and knowing. Through Indigenous educators, we can uncover and fully understand the colonial structure of education while untangling power relations and moving forward in meaningful ways. This research will investigate how Indigenous early childhood educators make and hold space for Indigenous pedagogy within mainstream child care.

Making space is a transformative praxis that engages the dominant settler-colonial cultural system to create a sustainable place of existence for Indigenous ways of knowing, being,

thinking, acting, speaking, and living (Ray, 2012). This research is interested in the making of Indigenous space by FNMI educators in mainstream education. It is also interested in how the educators maintain, "holding" it, so it is a living, breathing entity within the colonial institution.

Literature Review

Indigenous ECE voices are seldomly heard within the early years' field. There is very little research literature available about Indigenous perspectives that guide pedagogical practices within child care. This literature review will explore the small quantity of literature on the IECE. It will examine the educator's identity formation and consider Indigenous pedagogy use in early childhood settings.

The Indigenous ECE

The basis of IECE's pedagogy is the relationship (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Huston, Mason & Loon, 2020; Peterson, Jang, San Miguel, Styres & Madsen, 2018). IECEs focus on building trusting relationships with the child, family, community and land. An Indigenous educator understands child development begins with relationships (Huston et al., 2020). The child's relationships interconnect with their physical, emotional, mental, social well-being and spiritual development to form a holistic approach to learning (Huston et al., 2020; Peterson et al., 2008). Relationship with the land is built into daily life through experiential learning outside (Peterson et al., 2008). IECEs tend to share their knowledge of the land in the hope of instilling a joy for nature (Peterson et al., 2008). Children are regularly offered opportunities to explore and connect with nature. Knowledge and skills are built through observing and doing. Children are granted space to explore and problem solve (Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Peterson et al., 2008). IECEs trust in the child's ability to resolve conflict (Peterson et al., 2008). Space allows for the child's potential to be actualized.

The research containing insight into the IECE practice is within Indigenous early learning centres. Typically, the motive of researching the Indigenous educator is to inform non-Indigenous ECEs on how to effectively engage with FNMI children in Indigenous early learning centres (Ball & Simpkins, 2004; Fasoli & Ford, 2001; Peterson et al., 2008). This motive does little to encourage reconciliation throughout the sector. There is a gap in the research literature on IECEs practices within mainstream child care. Overall, IECEs are under-represented within the early years' field, resulting in the silencing of their voices and pushing their pedagogical practices into a hidden discourse.

Educator's Identity Formation

Identity is the social and cultural construction of self in relation to society; therefore, always in flux (Hughes, 2013; Izadini, 2014; Pearson, 2016). It is formed through the storying of lived experiences (Izadini, 2016). According to Hughes (2013), a teacher's identity is constructed from their worldview and their social positioning within that ideology. Most of the research on an educator's identity focuses on the dominant Eurocentric construction of the self (Hughes, 2013; Pearson, 2016). When race is included, it is how settler teachers can engage multiracial students (Pearson, 2016). Educators of different cultures become other and inferior.

An educator's identity influences how the curriculum is constructed and delivered (Hughes, 2013; Morgan, 2017). It affects the way teachers engage with students (Morgan, 2017). The dominant settler stories and discourse that have been naturally embedded within educational institutions must be challenged, especially in early childhood settings (Pearson, 2016). Pearson (2016) challenges early childhood educators to investigate through reflective practices the following question "How does my experience with race and my past shaped the lens through which I see my students, my school, and myself as an educator?" (p. 332).

Indigenous educator voices can help counter the narrative of the dominant story of Canada. Their self-in relation stories can be powerful examples of self-discovery and enable the re-shaping of early childhood practices.

Indigenous Pedagogy

The theory of Indigenous pedagogy has been discussed in research articles (Somerville & Hickey, 2017; Styres, Haig-Brown & Blimkie, 2013; Tuck et al., 2014). Indigenous pedagogy is defined by Biermann & Townsend-Crown (2008) as a knowledge system that conveys meaning, values and identity. Land as a transcending living organism is where the knowledge transfer occurs (Somerville & Hickey, 2017; Styres, Haig-Brown & Blimkie, 2013). Land in Indigenous pedagogical thought is the "first teacher" (Styres, Haig-Brown & Blimkie, 2013, p. 5).

Indigenous pedagogy strengthens the relationship between self and land.

The literature on implementing Indigenous pedagogy is typically discussed within an elementary, secondary or post-secondary setting (Bang et al., 2014; Somerville & Hickory, 2017; Styres, Haig-Brown & Blimkie, 2013; Zinga & Styres, 2011). There is limited literature on the implementation of Indigenous pedagogy by IECs within the early childhood sector.

Rowan (2017), an Inuit ally, investigated Nunangat (land, ice and water) within an early childhood centre. The Inuit ECEs and the children explored Inuit knowledge of the trapping of a fox. Nunangat pedagogies placed the child on the land with an Elder constructing knowledge. The experience enlarges the Inuit worldview while connecting children to Inukjuak practices (Rowan, 2017). Rowan's investigation disturbs Eurocentric dominant curricula while exposing alternative ways of being with children.

Conclusion

The Indigenous educators teaching within mainstream child care are the embodiment of relationality between Indigenous/Settler. Their presence within the classroom emphasizes the weaved narrative between Indigenous and Eurocentric knowledge systems.

Their stories can inspire other Indigenous educators and help establish allies willing to begin navigating the braiding of two worldviews. Indigenous educators may be the key to affirming and claiming Indigenous pedagogy in mainstream child care.

Semah has been offered. It is within the eastern door; the Indigenous worldview has been remembered. Within the Indigenous paradigm, a question has been asked: How are Indigenous ECEs making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy within mainstream child care? The circular journey begins.

A lovely smell carried on the southern wind. A smell that reminds the soul of kindness.

Following the sweet warmth, the southern doorway appears. It is within this space relationships will be embraced.

Chapter 2. Trust: Relational Methodology

Connection to all our relations

Trust



We enter the emotive Southern Doorway of Trust. The Trust in relationality and relationships. Braided sweetgrass is gifted to newly forged relationships as a symbol of love, honesty and kindness. This chapter provides an overview of the inquiry strategies used to build a trusting relationship with the community and participants within the research. The storytelling that occurred during semi-structured

interviews allowed the lived experiences of Indigenous ECE's to be told. The act of storying supported the blossoming of relationships.

Storying

Since time immemorial, stories have brought people together. Thomas King writes, "the truth about stories is that's all we are." (King, 2003, p.12). Our identity emerges through stories revealing our morals, ethics (Johnson, 2015). The stories we share allows us to begin to understand our world. Each story is from the teller's perspective; insight is gained through listening while a new set of relational understanding emerges. An effective means to insight and making meaning of a phenomenon is through the theoretical process of telling and listening (Gwenneth & Bunda, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Lamber, 2014;). If we listen carefully, we can hear teachings, for storying holds knowledge ergo knowledge and stories are inseparable (Kovach, 2009; Lamber, 2014). To Kovach (2009), an Indigenous paradigm containing storytelling is "an inseparable relationship between stories and knowing, and the interrelationship between narrative and research." (p.94).

The traces of who we are is revealed in the reciprocal process of telling and listening. The relationship between teller and listener connects and reaffirms our sense of belonging (Kovach, 2009). Self-in-relation is understood through storying. We each hold stories. Our memory stores our life experiences, and by sharing them, meanings and connections are made and remade. What it means to be human is communicated through the storying of life happenings, events and perspectives. The rich, layered complexity of life unfolds through narration, gifting us insight into the human condition. Storying is the living and active experience of being alive.

Personal narratives contain the storying of place and experience (Kovach, 2009). The personal oral history storey dives deep into an individual's experience uncovering what it means to live in a particular space (Kovach, 2009). Narratives shared function to expand understandings and connect issues central to the lives of individuals, community and society (Lambert, 2014). Knowledge is constructed through the manifestation of storying (Haig-Brown & Dannenmann, 2002).

Oral stories are a common methodology used in researching teachers' experiences (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2007). This research uses personal narratives/oral histories to gain insight into the experience of being an IECE in mainstream child care. The stories shared gave an insider's perspective of what it means to make and hold space as an IECE. It is through their stories I was able to gain insight into the phenomenon.

The process of storying empowers the participant, for they determine how their story unfolds. The researcher might use questions to help the narration flow, but the participant has full agency over telling the story. Inquiry through storying is grounded in relationships (Gwenneth & Bunda, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Lamber, 2014). In the Indigenous paradigm, a researcher requesting a participant to share their oral history must be willing to share their own

story. A reciprocal relationship develops between the researcher and participant in the holistic exchange of knowledge. A sacred space is created through the act of sharing one's story; therefore, profound respect and trust are required in this approach (Kovach, 2009; Lewis, 2006).

The Anishinaabe Seven Grandfather teachings guided me as I walk through this research. One of the teachings is Truth. Truth means to be true to all things; yourself and your place in life. I am an IECE, as a full member of the group being researched, I held the responsibility to speak my own truth. Aware of the storying protocol, I actively engaged in sharing my self-location story allowing the participant to assess my motivations for the research. The research asked the IECE to be brave and speak their truth. By sharing my story, I created a space for the participants to share their stories. Seeking knowledge through storying is powerful for it gives voice to the silence.

Throughout the storying interviews, I shared myself with the participants. We exchanged stories about being an Indigenous educator. The participants and I entered into a co-creation process that oral stories invite (Kovach, 2009). Reflexivity allowed us to express our inwardly knowing of being an IECE in mainstream child care. The stories told were from the heart. An Anishinaabe Elder once told me, "There are two ways of thinking, with our heart or mind. But used together, it changes everything. Let your heart guide your mind. It will lead you to wonderful places." (Elder from Chippewa Tribe, Sault Ste. Marie, personal communication, 1996). Reflexivity opened a space where this research could enter both heart and mind knowledge. The stories shared were transformative.

Interviews

In interpretive qualitative research, interviews are purposeful conversations that allow the researcher to gain knowledge from the participant's perspective (Chilisa, 2012; Burgess, 2006;

Patton, 2015). It involves gathering participants' stories to find out what meaning and knowledge they carry to understand their reality. In an Indigenous paradigm, the interview conversation is based on relational ways of knowing that upholds respect for all relations (Chilisa, 2012). The interview is a social interaction that builds the relationship between the research, researcher and participant (Seidman, 2013). The researcher is responsible for preparing an ethical space to ensure that the interviewer and interviewee enter a space where two minds can meet on equal grounding. Thus, allowing for deep and contextual dialogue to emerge freely.

I created an ethical space based on the concept of love. An Anishinaabe word for love is *zhawenim*, meaning "to have compassion or affections for another in one's thoughts and mind" (Borrows, 2019). To have compassion is respecting another's perspective. A space created from love flows with support for the other. Through this ethical love space, the participants were able to feel supported in sharing their experiences as an IECE.

Subjectivity is essential in the Indigenous interview method. To forge a relationship, the researcher must bring her whole self to the space and capable of listening with her heart and mind. Through relationship building, the interviewer has the honour of being brought into the participant's world. It is the interviewer's responsibility to build a trusting space where the participant feels comfortable sharing their story (Kovach, 2009). Only then can researchers obtain high-quality information by interviewing experts on a topic (Patton, 2015).

This research utilized a semi-structured interview format to create a space for an in-depth talk about the phenomena. In the interviews, I employed the use of an interview guide (Appendix A). The guide was used to support the narratives by offering possible themes and questions. The interview guide also ensured similar types of data were collected from each participant. However, the sequencing of questions was unique to each participant. The semi-

structured interview allowed for stories to unfold naturally. The participants regulated the flow of the interview.

Semi-structured interviews enabled me as the researcher freedom to “explore, probe and ask questions that will elucidate and illuminate” an experience (Patton, 2015 p.283). Open-ended questions allowed the interviewee to share and narrate experiences related to the topic (Johnson, 2017). Follow up questions were employed to build on the perspective of the participant (Johnson, 2017). The semi-structured interview enabled the participant to share their story and discuss how she, as an IECE, is making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy within mainstream child care centres.

Zoom Recordings

Due to Covid-19, the interviews for this research were conducted over Zoom, a video communication platform. As a videoconferencing app, Zoom connects people virtually for face-to-face interaction. The app allows you to set up a virtual video and audio call. One of the features offered through Zoom is the ability for the call to be recorded. By recording the interview, I could be fully engaged in the telling and listening process of storying.

Visual and audio media support research by capturing the details of the participants' knowledge while allowing the researcher to be fully present during the interview (Mukherji & Albon, 2015). By reviewing recordings, the researcher can gain an in-depth understanding of the narrative. The researcher can replay the story over again, drawing it closer for analysis. The process of reviewing exposes moments that may have been missed during the moment (Patton, 2015). Revisiting the moment strengthens the connection between the narrative and the researcher's understanding of the knowledge shared. Videotaping, the interview captured the story's details and enriched the data collected.

The audio track of the Zoom recording was transcribed. I checked each audio track multiple times for accuracy. As owners of their narratives, the participants were emailed a copy of the transcriptions for their approval. Sharing the transcripts is an act of relational accountability. As a researcher, it was my responsibility to ensure each person was portrayed as they wished to be within the research. The reviewing of transcripts strengthens the relationship between the participants and me. The participants were able to clarify, add or remove sections of the transcript to ensure their story aligned with their perspectives on each subject. This granted the participant further reflection through their narrative. The transcripts' final approval ensures an authentic and ethical representation of the participant's narrative (Kovach, 2009).

Journal

A research journal was maintained throughout the process. The journal was used as a reflective narrative, recording significant events and thoughts occurring throughout the research process. The journal acted as a space to make relational meaning. It included my feelings, reactions to experiences, personal reflections and analysis (Mukherji & Albon, 2015, Patton, 2015). It was also where I examined aspects of the participant's responses to gain a greater insight into Indigenous educators' individual lived experiences in the early years, while making connections to the shared experience. The journal contains an examination of my own practice and how it connects to the larger community of IECs.

Community Relationships

Wisdom is one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, "to cherish knowledge is to know wisdom" (Benton-Banai, 1988, p.64). In my research, wisdom meant valuing the knowledge of wise people within the Indigenous early years' community and the Indigenous community at large. A year was dedicated to building and fostering relationships within the community.

Through meaningful reciprocal dialogue, I was able to obtain a deeper understanding of Indigenous communities, the Indigenous early childhood sector, and Indigenous educators' lived experiences. Through conversations, I began to comprehend the substantial gap between IECE and the early years of the field. There is a considerable amount of literature on the benefits of early childhood education within Indigenous communities (Ball, 2005; Ball, 2009; Ball, 2012; Greenwood, 2006; Putnam, Putnam, Jerome & Jerome, 2011; Townsend-Cross, 2004); however, the lived experiences of IECs are lacking in both Indigenous and mainstream child care. The IECE's voice is missing from the early years and child care discussion.

The community members' perspectives and wisdom helped shape this research in developing the inclusion criteria, and their lived experiences shaped some of the guiding questions. I also received support in understanding and learning protocols to ask for support, obtain community approval, and research conduct. Multiple communities offered support in the recruitment process by distributing flyers or social media posts (Appendix B: Indigenous Communities/Organizations). I am grateful for the relationships I built during this time. They are relationships that will continue and strengthen with time.

Sampling Criteria

This research sample was selected via a critically focused inclusion criteria. The focused inclusion sought to include people with similar features enabling the investigation into a phenomenon from a common perspective (Morse & Richards, 2002). The research participants shared the common experience of being an Indigenous person within the early childhood profession living in Southern Ontario.

The inclusion criteria specified that each participant must self-identify as First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Urban Aboriginal or Aboriginal¹. They needed to be over the age of 18 and currently working in or had worked previously in a mainstream child care setting. An ECE diploma or degree was not required². This criterion was developed with the insight of community members. The community noticed some Indigenous individuals working in child care did not have post-secondary accreditation due to colonization's ongoing effects, such as distrust for schooling due to negative experiences or accessibility of post-secondary education (personal communications, winter/spring/summer 2020). This research focused on the implementation of Indigenous pedagogy; thus, the Indigenous lived experience within the mainstream child care was the directive for inclusion. Finally, to be included, participants must live in Southern Ontario. A focus on one geographical group ensures similar features between the participants (Morse & Richards, 2002). This last criterion was also developed with the help of community members. The wisdom given was IECs in Southern Ontario had more opportunity for work, professional development, and fewer barriers to overcome than their Northern counterparts. Although it would be beneficial to investigate the range of IECE experiences throughout the province of Ontario, the scope of such an investigation is beyond the capacity of this research project's time frame.

¹ The research was required by the Ryerson Ethics Board to include the self-identify terms Aboriginal and Urban Aboriginal. The term Aboriginal is the legal term used in the *Canadian Constitution Act of 1982* to identify Indigenous people in Canada.

² *The Child Care and Early Years Act*, 2014, Section 1, O. Reg. 126/16, s. 49 sets out the ratio requirements for child care centres. In most ratio scenarios, only one qualified employee is required. A qualified employee is a RECE. All other employees do not have to be a RECE. However, all employees, are responsible for the learning and care of the children enrolled in the class.

Recruitment

The participants were recruited through multiple flyers and email campaigns. The flyers and emails were distributed through various Indigenous communities and organizations in Southern Ontario. As the research flyer circulated, a snowball effect occurred within the recruitment process. The flyer, social media post, and email were shared with potential participants. Participants who were recruited shared their experiences with other Indigenous ECEs, resulting in further recruitment. The flyers in all the campaigns described the study's intent, inclusion requirements and duration of a Zoom interview (Appendix C: Recruitment Material). The flyer and email clearly stated that interested participants contact me directly through Facebook Messenger or email.

Consent

Once I received a potential participant's interest in the study, I emailed a letter of information and consent form (Appendix D: Letter of Information/Consent Form). Traditionally, a tobacco bundle would be offered at the beginning of the interview to gain consent from the participant; however, due to Covid-19 and the current social distancing requirements, the interview was held online through Zoom. To uphold our tradition, I offered to mail participants a tobacco bundle. No participant gave consent through tobacco.

Most participants gave oral consent. The participants indicated through email they had read the letter of information and wanted to book an interview. Before commencing the interview, I went over the letter of information to ensure participants understood the research, what was involved in participating, the potential benefits/risks, ensured they met the inclusion criteria and knew participating was voluntary. To proceed with the interview, I asked for oral consent to participate in the research, record the interview, and transcribe the audio track. All of

the participants freely agreed to participate, be recorded and have the interview transcribed.

Agreeing to participate through oral consent is acceptable in Indigenous research (Wilson, 2008).

It upholds our oral tradition.

Reciprocity

The knowledge shared by the participant was a gift. In the spirit of reciprocity, a token of appreciation was given to each participant. They were emailed a \$10.00 Tim Horton's gift card thanking them for participating and sharing their story.

Participants

A total of ten IECE answered the call to participate (see Table 1). Each participant self-identified as First Nation, Métis or Indigenous. Eight participants work(ed) as a registered early childhood educator (RECE), and one participant had certification as an ECE. There was one participant who only had lived experience. She had thirty years in the field³. Three participants held university degrees. Two other RECEs were seeking additional post-secondary credentials.

The participants' experience ranged from 10 to 30 years in mainstream child care. Two of the participants had retired from the field. Another two participants had transitioned within the last year into managerial roles. Four ECEs had moved onto educational positions within Indigenous communities. Only two participants currently worked in mainstream child care.

Due to the lengthy careers in mainstream child care, each participant had experience with most age groups, infancy to school-aged. However, each one spent a significant amount of time

³ The participant was working in the field prior to the establishment of the College of Early Childhood Educators. The title ECE is now reserved for individuals that have been accepted into the College of ECE.

with a particular age group. Eight participants would classify themselves as preschool teachers. One classified herself as a toddler teacher, and one spoke of her love of being with infants.

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Participant	Identity	Education	Experience (yrs.)	Age Group
1	Métis	ECE Diploma	20	Infants
2	First Nation	ECE Diploma	10	Preschool
3	Indigenous	ECE Diploma Enrolled in a Leadership Diploma program	11	Preschool
4	First Nation	ECE Certification Bachelor of Education	20	Preschool
5	First Nation	ECE Diploma	21	Preschool
6	Métis	Live experience	30	Preschool
7	Indigenous	ECE Diploma, Enrolled in Bachelor of Child Development	10	Preschool
8	First Nation	ECE Diploma	15	Toddler
9	Métis	ECE Diploma, 2 Diplomas in mental health, Bachelor of Arts	27	Preschool
10	Métis	ECE Diploma, Bachelor of Child Development	23	Preschool

The participants' experience ranged from 10 to 30 years in mainstream child care. Two of the participants had retired from the field. Another two participants had transitioned within the last year into managerial roles. Four ECEs had moved onto educational positions within Indigenous communities. Only two participants currently worked in mainstream child care.

Due to the lengthy careers in mainstream child care, each participant had experience with most age groups, infancy to school-aged. However, each one spent a significant amount of time with a particular age group. Eight participants would classify themselves as preschool teachers. One classified herself as a toddler teacher, and one spoke of her love of being with infants.

Building Relationship

Relationship building is the cornerstone of Indigenous research. It is through a relationship that knowledge is created. Typically, before exchanging knowledge, a meal is

shared, which allows a comfort level to build between those present. Covid-19 restrictions significantly impacted the relational capacity of this research. The opportunity to gather and build a relationship was impossible due to physical, social distancing regulations.

The interviews were conducted online through the Zoom platform. The video option allowed the participants and me to see each other, which helped in the physical aspects of relationship building. Each of us could see the other's body language supporting the telling and listening of storying.

I was conscious that the responsibility to construct a space over Zoom, where a relationship was able to blossom, was mine. The southern door represents emotion. I prepared an ethical space where we could be emotionally vulnerable. I had to bring my whole self to each interview. I relied on the teachings of honesty to help guide me. I was completely honest with each participant. The educator knew I was in this space to listen to their story. We together entered into a holistic exchange of stories. The exchange of stories bonded us into a relationship. We bravely entrusted ourselves and our stories with a stranger, who became a kinder spirit in the end.

The journey through the southern door has ended. Reciprocal relationships were built on the concepts of respect and trust. The westerly wind is carrying the woodsy smell of sage. We are entering the western doorway of knowledge. It is there where we will strengthen the connections shared in storying and answer the question of how are IECs are making and holding space in mainstream child care.

Chapter 3. Knowledge

The teaching of the heart and mind.

Knowledge



The swirling of smoky sage floats on the air. Breathe deeply, for we have entered the Westerly Doorway of knowledge. We stand on the cusp of clarity. Facing East, we look back, observing the world from the edge. Our backs are held up by ancestral wisdom. It is here we will pull the strings of relationships closer; with each

inch, the smoke will fade, and new/old knowledge will become visible. Within this space, we will build a new set of relations that will expand our understanding of how IECs are making and holding space within mainstream child care.

Data Analysis

The findings were derived from semi-structured interviews that explored IECs lived experiences within mainstream child care. This research uses a circular interpretative phenomenological analysis. An interpretative approach to meaning making is a subjective account of a social experience giving insight into a phenomenon (Kovach, 2009). The circular nature of the analysis allowed the lived experience of the participants to become a relational whole. During the analysis, the relationship to the oral stories was a priority for the process of becoming a collective story involved re-storying through my own lens. The re-storying process allowed each participant's story to be interconnected, creating a story sphere.

By reviewing the video recordings, I was able to build multiple layered relationships with each story. It was essential for me to listen carefully as it and reflect deeply upon the IECE's words, enabling me to carry them relationally to the next, resulting in the story sphere. As I

walked through the circular process, I was consciously aware of the responsibility to respect each participant's story as they interconnected with others. It was my responsibility to construct a whole that honoured the collective relational reality.

Within the circular methodology, an intuitive logic is present (Wilson, 2008). My lived experience as an IECE supported the analysis and became a part of the collective. The combination of intuitive knowledge and lived experience allows for leaps to be made (Wilson, 2008). It is the ability to see the data as a whole system of interconnected relationships that enables new ideas to formulate.

A higher state of awareness is only possible by walking repetitively around the Circle. With each passing, a deeper understanding of what was occurring was possible. It was through this repetition that a new set of relations was constructed to answer the research question. Looking at the stories from multiple perspectives took me to a place where insights were revealed to answer the question.

The personal narratives shared represent the foundational element of the collective story sphere. To understand the set of relationships being co-constructed by the participants' stories, I metaphorically created an empty space within the center of the Circle, and I solicited the help of the Four Directions to help answer the question, “How are IECEs making and holding space in mainstream child care for Indigenous pedagogy?”

Collective Story: Findings and Discussion

The re-storied analysis represents my interpretation of the IECEs' collective experience; thus, results should be viewed through a subjective lens. The participants' stories are told in a collective voice to support the interpretative analysis.

Ethical Space

Standing in the middle of the Circle, I posed a question to the eastern direction of illumination, "How are Indigenous ECEs making space in mainstream child care?" Stories began to light up like shooting stars across the sky. As I walked around the storied walls, I began to see...

What I was doing was just me being me and not even knowing that's what it was. And we had space and time to do that, or maybe I had found a way to make that space, right? Maybe I just said this is me. This is who I am. We're talking about a group of children who are learning and preparing for the future and how they're going to interact with others who may not identify the same way as them. How are we going to build that relationship and learn to celebrate each other and live together? How are we doing that? Well, that starts here in the classroom. So, if I'm bringing a part of myself into the room and I'm inviting you to do the same, we're learning about each other, and it's a safe space to do so. I guess it was just me making the space to do that. Me being me.

Those things that I have as a Haudenosaunee and holding a safe space. Every child, whatever they need, we're there. We slow down; we walk with them. We treat them with respect and that they understand kindness and have empathy. It's a meeting of bodies and space and of being. I see how I can empower them to look at things differently or take the time to notice what they're looking at. I think when you make space for that, that's when children have an opportunity to understand as much as my ideas are important, your idea is important too. So, I feel it is so important for me to do what I can in my space to create that space so that they don't have to. It'll become much easier for them (to create it later). They'll see it happening. So, they'll just be empowered. They'll understand that there is space and that it's valued, and it exists. Whether children come into my class, Indigenous or not, I think the greater message through that is acceptance and tolerance. That we all belong, we all have our stories, and we all are valued.

Everybody sits in different places but finding one place that will help align us, so we can be there and deliver support to the children is important. It's living. It is not just what happens. I want the kids to feel love, safe, and that identity is something I've strived for. When I worked in the preschool room, the biggest transition for them was going to school. I wanted them to know who they are, that they could advocate and stand up for themselves. They had a voice. They knew their name. So, as they entered into this new environment that they had pieces to take with them. Giving them more of a social-emotional foundation. What they really needed was to be able to focus and to hear, and to work well with others. It's along that line, but it's more, it's more... deeper.

As I reflected on the stories shared, I realized the IECs described an ethical space of engagement. Ermine (2007) conceptualizes ethical space as a place formed when two societies with different worldviews, Indigenous and western, are poised to engage with each other. Each entity bringing to the space their history, knowledge, and relational realities. It is within their uniqueness that a theoretical space is constructed, opening a place for engagement.

French philosopher Levinas' theory of the ethic encounter conceptualizes an ethical engagement between two people based on obligations for the other (Dami, Pandu, Anakotta, & Sachureka, 2019; Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Levinas's theory places human interaction into an ethical space of responsibility. Responsibility precedes the encounter. It is forged from an unknown, innate origin. Levinas specifies it is not a commitment or a decision; responsibility is unavoidable and an obligation to others (Dami et al., 2019; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Readings, 1998). Levinas depiction of responsibility is similar to the Indigenous concept of responsibility and relational accountability.

In *The University in Ruins*, educational scholar Readings (1996) theorizes the embodiment of an ethical encounter as a pedagogy based on listening, relationship and obligation. According to Readings (1996), the site of obligation exceeds an individual's consciousness for justice. An obligation is an accountability. Readings further describe this type of pedagogy as relational. The theories presented by Levinas and Readings are similar to the Indigenous worldview of respect, responsibility and relational accountability.

The significance of the ethical encounter is the space between the two entities. The space becomes full of possibility, dialogue, unspoken thoughts, interest and ideas. It is the energy of the 'between' that influences the engagement. The conceptualization of ethical space leads to a dignified mutual relational framework based on dialogue (Ermine, 2007). Readings pedagogy of

ethical encounter depicts a specific type of dialogue: encoded with lived experience, history and positionality (Readings, 1996). The dialogue engages an individual's inward and outward speech (Readings, 1996). According to Readings, the space between is the pedagogy. Ermine and Readings emphasize the space between is essential. In the betweenness, a together yet dissociating relationship is possible (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). This unique relationship (together/separate) enables the possibility of differences; thus, the child becomes a stranger in the adult/child relationship, ergo disrupting the normative narrative of child development (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005). Within this space, the child is a fully actualized individual with multiple identities, shattering the normative practice of compartmentalizing and classifying a child by progress (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

The ethical encounter leads to ethical engagement where knowledge attainment transforms into a relational co-construction (Dahlberg, 2003; Dahlberg & Moss, 2005; Moss, 2006; Readings, 1996). The betweenness is an environment where thinking beside is possible, and thought is maintained through dialogue, verbal and non-verbal. The ethical encounter of adult/child makes relational knowledge possible. The continuation of the engagement creates a relational web of thought.

The child/adult engage in a reciprocal relation rooted in the cycle of giving and receiving. The reconceptualist scholar Dahlberg (2003) describes this relationship in teaching as the "welcoming of the stranger" (p.273). The receiving and welcoming of the stranger (child) construct a discourse that receives the other beyond the capacity of self (Dahlberg, 2003). The teacher in this relationship is able to hear and see the child. In the ethical encounter, the individual moves from individualism/ subject into a subjective perspective.

The Indigenous reciprocal relationship reinforces self-in-relation. The interconnection thought moves the singular individual into a plurality (Simpson, 2014). Subjectivity in the adult/child relationship removes the teacher as master over the subject/child. The Indigenous ethical thought of non-interference promoted positive interpersonal relationships (Preston, 2019). The ethical space opens possibilities for different ways of being together. Subjectivity allows for agency in the betweenness.

The IECEs created a space where two entities, adult and child, could bring their full selves and engage. In Ermine's ethical space theory, the space is instantly engaged when two entities collide. This was occurring with the ECEs and children; however, the IECE understood it was the adult's responsibility to role model resulting in an opening for the child to walk through. By bringing her identity to the space, the IECE demonstrated how to be in a space fully as you are while being in a respectful relationship with another individual.

I was entering a classroom and making the children feel comfortable about bringing parts of their identity into the room by showing them parts of my identity. And that was by speaking about my family, that was about talking about how I have a relationship with the land, that was about acknowledging the land that we're on and who was here first, and when we go outside looking at how we describe that adventure.

The IECE was creating a safe environment where two identities could come together. In this relationship, the child was a fully actualized individual; with experience, knowledge, history, philosophy, social and political reality (Ermine, 2007). Thus, the child became a whole, full of potential and capable of becoming. The space allowed both the IECE and child to realize their capabilities. It was a place where individual gifts could be shared and nurtured.

The IECE and child become engaged in a relational framework based on the principles of respect and reciprocity. The adult/child relationship in this space was balance; the hierarchy of power was non-existent. They are engaged in a reciprocal relationship as equals.

I made them part of the decision-making, and if they wanted to share something, we gave them time to share.

Our day flowed, and what we did emerge organically. Something would spark our interest, like a bee on a flower, and we went with it. What was the bee doing? We would look closely at things. One time we followed the bee and ended up knowing where it lived. Schedule, routines fade away when you are completely in the moment. And when you're in that moment, there is a fluidity between you and the children. There was a natural movement between us and throughout your day.

Ethical space becomes a peaceful co-habitation (Kovach, 2013). Within this co-habitation, the adult and child were able to construct knowledge through multiple forms of expression.

He came into our room nonverbal, and he became so confident. Even though he didn't have his speech, he was still up there on our little stage for our show and shared. He stood on that block, and we would do our best to engage. He was never shy, he'd hold it up, and he would nod and shake his head, and his friends would help with the interpretation. We supported him through it. To me, that was huge that the group supported him in this and that he felt comfortable. He had his space. What the kids took from this is that anything that they were, they contributed to the space. For me, what it looks like they got from those experiences, anybody could make space, and we would help hold it and help shape it.

A praxis of dialogue emerged, allowing for understanding to be gained. It is the ongoing cycle of reflection and action between the child and teacher that places them in a reciprocal relationship. It is an active relational process that includes seeking continuous counsel and dialogue on matters from the parties involved (Kovach, 2013).

I would say the one thing I do deliberately, I try to have the children be as democratic as possible when we choose things. So, I definitely want democracy. That's something I definitely do, want a true democracy that gives everybody a voice. I actually remember a lot of times when I couldn't figure stuff out, I'll say okay, we're all going to vote. Sometimes we wouldn't find a resolution, but they would all be satisfied that they were able to express what they wanted. Then sometimes, we would change direction on what we were originally going to do.

It is within this ethical space, the child and adult experience the richness of being. Through the engagement of the space 'between,' the adult/child were able to co-exist. New sets of

relationships within their environment emerged in the space between. The reciprocal relationship enabled the co-construction of knowledge. There were an active back and forth dialogue that allows the making and remaking of knowledge.

I have seen the wind dance because a child showed me. It is amazing what children see. They remind you to look.

Teaching to me is not really teaching, it's walking with them. The part where they really learn is when you're not teaching them what the curriculum says but are just walking with them. To be engaged with people and have relationships is way more important.

When I'm with the children, there is so much possibility. Being in the moment with them is amazing. Time fades away, and you're just there. Anything can happen. To see how they are making connections. One child will notice something, and then it will lead us somewhere else. I learn so much by being with the children. They remind me to slow down and look closer. It is within that slowing down that learning occurs.

When you're walking with children and just being with them, it's there where life comes alive. Together, we're able to explore it. It's in the moments.

Sometimes we just need to be. When we're just being, things still get accomplished.

We're still going to have lunch. It's not like we're not going to have lunch, but it might flow differently. Then slowly, you kind of let go, and you start to see that being is actually a lot more fun than just doing. I find like with the doing it's that Eurocentric do, do, do.

With the being, it's organic. You do it because you have faith that the children are intelligent, and together you can figure it out. By making that shift, a place of acceptance and understanding occurs where we can just be. I think we learn to see things differently. It's a gift to see the potential and possibility of living. Life is pretty amazing. It's like a quantum soup. Just being...is full of possibilities. So, if they can understand how to live better and also understand it in a different way, I think, why wouldn't we want to do that. It's like it's time for a new way of being.

The IECE and child were engaged in creating an ethical space where they could bring their whole self to the moment and create new relationships within it. The ethical space was offered to family, community and colleagues. The family and community entered the space through the child and, in doing so, were able to maintain the balance and harmony of the space. Families were able to engage in respectful ways, for they could see their child being fully accepted and respected. This is evident through the family engagement within the classroom.

I think making that space is really important because it reaffirms people's identity. It creates a space where people are, and children feel welcome and open to be who they are. Yeah, and not just the children, the families because we have to consider too, that

there are generations that are seeking places to feel safe in spaces, and if they see that their children have that opportunity, it helps.

Having that open communication and knowing it's not just their child you care about it's the whole family that made a difference.

When the children graduated and moved on to kindergarten, parents would give a thank you card. I had one family write me this beautiful message that really touched me. It basically said you truly knew my child, you saw her as we do, and she has grown because of that. Messages like that reaffirm that what I'm doing, what is occurring in my classroom, is something special, and parents can see it.

One mother would spend almost an hour in the garden with us. It was so amazing to see the mother/child relationship within that space. Other children would come up to her and share what they were doing. It was beautiful. The garden became a place where families could share their knowledge and stories. Another family would water the plants on the weekend. In the fall, families would share their recipes and come in and help the children cook. We would gather as a community and have lunch. It was amazing to see all these different families coming together to celebrate. And it was the children that connected us. The gift of storytelling is for a lot of cultures and communities, not just First Nations. So, if we look at Indigenous pedagogy, if you will, it's really important to bring that into the classroom space because it does relate and touch on a lot of other cultures' practices and beliefs. A lot of communities have given that feedback... I believe where they've seen those similarities, and they've made those connections because it's touched on something that they've grown up with or heard in their childhood, 'We have this story that's similar to that.' So, while we're on this land, we know who the original caretakers of this land are, if we carry that, it's also an invitation to bring in the other stories, right? This story is similar to that...see, we share so much.

Ethical space is a delicate balancing act of giving and receiving. It is where two different sets of intentions confront each other (Zinga, 2019). To keep the energy between the two entities positive mutual respect must be maintained. In mainstream child care, the ethical space of engagement tends to fall apart when extended to colleagues. The space between the Indigenous and western knowledge systems becomes entrenched with differences (Zinga, 2019). As an educational institution, child care was created out of the patriarchal, Eurocentric society (Zinga, 2019). Education and its institutions are not neutral spaces; thus, are not culturally fair (Battiste, 2013). Child care carries a colonial history within its daily structure, practices, policies, and pedagogies (Zinga, 2019). Colonial history reaffirms the privilege and status quo of the mainstream. An imbalance of power overruns the ethical space confrontation between

Indigenous and western ECE. The dialogue framework collapses due to the hidden, inherited, unquestioned, colonial mainstream social constructs that devalue other ways of being and creates an "otherness" to those who do not conform to the dominant paradigm. Zinga (2019) explains this as a self-perpetuating cycle "those who are seen to be mainstream are indoctrinated in the beliefs and ideologies that act to subjugate and devalue beliefs, ideologies and peoples who do not fit the prescribed mould." (p. 281). It was within the meeting of colleagues where colonial hierarchies play out. The IECE described misunderstandings, micro-aggression and acts of discrimination when interacting with their colleagues.

I often had to explain myself. I got a lot of side looks. Unfortunately, I was starting to get used to it. Instead of asking me, I would just get side looks.

If anything, they would go to my co-worker because apparently, I had a... There's a difference about me. I would have to say that they perceive that I was unapproachable. They wouldn't question me. They had a perception about me, even though they didn't know me.

People being, "Oh, you don't look native. What percent are you?" Like that's none of your business. That's so offensive.

I had one colleague, I was talking to her out on the playground, but I had to go in. She started to talk with a parent. I was at the door, and I could hear her. She was being very demeaning towards the Native community. She was like, "All the Natives do is drink. They're just a bunch of drunks." I was at the door, my colleague turned and looked at me like 'what are you gonna do?'

I don't understand where it came from. To this day, I still don't know, but I did experience a bit of bullying... was it because I'm Indigenous, and I had these ideas about what it meant to be in relationship with the land? That was probably one of the most difficult [situations]. I didn't stay there for too long because I found it too... it conflicted too much with my values and beliefs.

There's like overt racism where like I had a co-worker be like "Too many Indians, not enough Chiefs," and I was like, "You can't say that." She was like, why not. I was really, you can't say that. So, having those conversations with people.

Once I felt like, whoa, this is discrimination. I was taken back as I've never experienced that. It felt like an attack. Then I kind of just felt from that same source, just unkindness. Like brush off, you do what you're going to do, whatever. I just kind of felt not welcomed. I felt a little discriminated and then after not welcome. Discrimination can be just as painful as racism, and it's a little bit more under the rug because it's not as obvious, and it's just as painful.

There was a teacher, she thought that she was being cute and made a little joke about how the shirts for Orange shirt day don't match her complexion. I was like, "Honey, my

Grandfather went to day school. My whole family is still dealing with the effects of residential school. We don't really care if the colour of the shirt goes with your complexion. That's super insensitive."

The Indigenous ECEs describe instances where the ethical space was undermined by an encounter entrenched with hierarchal power and ignorance. These transgressions infringed or violated the space of the other, causing harm. Ermine (2007) recognizes this as an Indigenous-western relation pattern. An encounter entrenched with dominance deteriorates the ethical space framework of dialogue. The mainstream's lack of awareness of how their space infringes on another and maintains the status quo.

It's sometimes hard to know for sure if what is happening, the sort of bullying that I've experienced or the exclusionary behaviours that I experienced, if they were a result of people not liking me for me or people not liking me because I'm Indigenous, without them outright saying 'hey, you can't do this because you're a lazy Indian' or whatever. It might even be subconscious for people when they are mistreating me because they know I'm Indigenous. They've had a lifetime of learning the wrong things about Indigenous people, being told things that are not true, and these stereotypes just don't serve us. If there's an underlying bias there, that could explain some of the things that I experienced.

If the space is left unexamined, the status quo remains a repetitive cycle (Zinga, 2019). The invitation to engage in the ethical space will continue to be met with rupture. The emotional toll of the relationship seemed to have been carried by the IECE. Ultimately, she was harmed by the encounter.

*Little by little, it became too much.
That's when it just became a job because I start seeing more [negative behaviour toward me]. That's what I found hard. And it just became my heart would ache.
I loved working with children and families. The difficulty was with my co-workers. It became too much for me.*

This may explain why only two of the participants are currently working in mainstream child care. Given the small sample size, I am unsure if the exit from mainstream ECE due to negative experiences is a reoccurring trend within the IECE community. Further research is

needed. However, 90% of the participants in this research spoke about negative experiences within their mainstream careers. Most of the participants had left mainstream child care. The two remaining Indigenous RECEs were unsure how much longer if they could endure.

It is within the ethical space of engagement where we may find the answer on how to resolve the entrenched problem between Indigenous and western encounters in the early childhood field. Ethical space is where two worldviews can interact. Worldviews often go unexamined and function at an unconscious level (Preston, 2019). It is through raising our conscience awareness of worldviews that we may empower understanding. Teaching ethical space could support successful communication, strengthen relationships and build respect between individuals and social groups. An awareness of the ethical space and rules of engagement could promote the growth of self and others.

The Indigenous worldview holds the idea that there is space for everything. Our ancestors engaged in ethical space. The evidence is within our treaties. The Two Row Wampum Treaty is based upon engaging and maintaining ethical space. Parallel, co-existing, two boats representing the Indigenous and western worldview travel side by side in harmony, causing no harm to the other. Each a fully actualized entity engaged in a respectful, reciprocal relationship that upholds each other's dignity and humanity.

Engaging in an ethical space maybe an innate concept for Indigenous people due to their worldview. Also, Indigenous people have learned to negotiate themselves between two knowledge systems. For non-Indigenous people, this negotiation between different knowledge systems is less familiar, given that cultural practices go unquestioned in the western framework privileging their knowledge system. An awareness of historical understanding and being familiarized with Indigenous ways of knowing may support ethical engagement. The intention

here is not to present a binary or one worldview as superior; it is to raise awareness of how engaging in a conversation between two worldviews can open new possibilities. Given the relationship between Indigenous and western societies, it would be wise to teach the concept of ethical space and the rules of engagement throughout all educational institutions. The ability to engage in a critical dialogue is a skill that can only be strengthened through practice. Providing opportunities for the creation and engagement of ethical space would support workplace relationships.

Teaching ethical space would also support efforts of reconciliation. The call for culturally appropriate early childhood education by TRC is possible where ethical spaces are co-constructed and co-maintained. The IECs shared their thoughts on what it means for the mainstream to answer the call for culturally appropriate ECE.

Culturally appropriate is acknowledging that not everything looks the way that you think. Children can start the foundation of understanding that everybody who is a settler they are a treaty person. They still have a responsibility. Even though they obviously didn't sign the treaties, they've inherited them, and they need to understand what that means. What that looks like and how to maintain them.

I think children are naturally more open to and receptive to the differences between people. I think if they were exposed to our practices, our ways at a younger age, they might grow up being more understanding of differences, more understanding of why Indigenous people are fighting so hard for their sovereignty to be acknowledged and recognized. I feel if Canada, a settler-colonial society, focused more on Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing and being that maybe we all would be better toward one another.

It's not something you just come in, and you read the policy and say okay. It's something that needs to be understood by everyone that works in the centre. It doesn't mean that they one hundred percent agree with it or they adopt the ways of Indigenous ways of knowing but that they understand why it's there. What the purpose of it is? It is going to make changes because we make space for it. It can't just be talked about. It has to start actually being practiced. The ones that perhaps really can't see it or don't understand it, I think that it is the responsibility of the organization honouring the TRC calls to ensure they're being honoured. It's not just a check of a box. When you think of the ECE child care, a lot of the ECE students that come, they're informed from faculty, which is the greater body. So, as we make these little smaller changes here (childcare), they also have to be rippling and happening on a greater scale. Meaning creating space for Indigenous

ways of knowing in the faculty departments of ECE programs. So that it's all being done together as a whole, I think that's a good place to start.

Ethical space within the early childhood field can reimagine a new/old way of being with children, families, community and colleagues. Enabling us to live well together.

IECEs are making space in mainstream childcare through the engagement of ethical space. They create opportunities for children to engage in the space 'between.' The co-created 'between' gives rise to learning opportunities. Within this space, the child is able to be self-actualized, resulting in the co-construct of knowledge and relationship. Ethical space is based on a dialogue framework that enables two entities, whether it is the adult/child relationship or two worldviews, to engage in the making and remaking of knowledge. Creating an ethical space can bridge the gap between the two intentions. To hold the space, rules of engagement must be learned and applied. The energy between becomes full of possibility. Ethical space (re)images a different way of being with others. It could revolutionize how we engage with children during the early years in the Canadian context.

Relationship

As I continue to walk the Circle of analysis, I journey to the South. The southern direction represents trust. With the help of this direction, I posed the question, "In the making of space, what does the IECE trust?"

I made it my business to have the best relationship I could have with the children if they needed to stop and talk to me. I would stop and talk to them.

Relationships are very important. It's probably, number one. Unless you have a rapport, a relationship with a child, they're not going to learn anything. They're not going to learn. The doors are going to be closed.

There was this one little guy, he was my buddy. And he speaks to those relationships and those children that I see, where I took that Auntie approach. I described it to my co-worker. She's like, what do you mean? I said it's just that little bit of extra like an Auntie would. I said in our language, it translates to little mother. That's giving them that little

bit of extra because he had a tough time transitioning into our room. So, she tried to connect with him, and it wasn't working. And so, I said, okay, I'll try. We managed to build our relationship and actually a really good one. When he would come in the morning, we had our routine. We would sit, and we would talk. I wanted it to be meaningful. I want them to know when they had me, they have me. Establishing relationships with children is easy because we speak the same language...I talk to them about how they feel when they're bare feet are in the grass or how they feel when the warm water is running over their hands. By bringing their awareness to their surroundings ... using those little opportunities to connect with children about something that we all speak the same language of... That's the smell of a flower. Those little pieces that maybe as adults, we tend to rush through our day and skip.

In the making of space, the IECE trusted relationships would be reciprocal in nature and enhance engagement. The ethical space allowed for an authentic relationship to develop between the child and IECE. Through self-actualization, we are able to connect with others (Cole, 2011; Ermine, 1995). Once achieved, we are able to connect with other life (Ermine, 1995). IECE's world lens was rooted in the concept of self-in-relation, and when offered to the child, a space opens where the child could achieve self-actualization. The IECE using her relational worldview, was able to create an ethical space where two individuals could meet and bring their whole self. The constructing of relationships supported the well-being and growth of the inner and outer reality.

I feel like relationship is the key if you want to have and cultivate something authentic. So, if you're willing to invest, it's got to come from your heart. I think a lot of times, when relationships are created in a hurry or without the time to get to know an individual. I think it takes away...I think when it comes to relationships, basics. Simplicity is the best start. It's just acknowledging that everybody is a human, and sometimes we all need each other. It might look different to one person to another, so it's just being in relationship. Sometimes that might be an ear to listen, to asking how your day is. But it's consistency. Like hey, how are you, checking up on you. So that you start to feel like, oh, this person cares. Then you slowly start to kind of reveal a little bit of yourself. Then it's this beautiful reciprocal relationship of back and forth. I think that when you have that reciprocal relationship, there's no such thing as a mistake, or you're not afraid to do anything because you're in a safe feeling of friendship and love. Sometimes, I feel like if that lacks in the relationship, maybe children hold back a little. They might not hundred percent trust, or they are scared to just kind of be who they are. I think that when you're in a relationship, both people can be who they really are.

The journey of accepting yourself can make space for other healthy relationships. The IECs all spoke to the journey of self-discovery within their identity. As they came into their own, their ability to form authentic relationships transformed. They were able to connect with the children and others on a deeper level.

It was something that I grew into because, in the beginning, you get busy, and I would often follow the lead of whoever was in the room, but then I became that person who was the lead in the room. It was just because I started changing and looking at things differently, coming into my own. When I started that journey with the kids, I got to know them and what they needed from me, to slow down and to be there for them. I always was able to connect with children. It was easy. But as I embraced my identity and began to bring it into the classroom, I notice my relationships changing. Parents were seeking my counsel, not my professional advice on child development, but counsel on walking with their child and doing it well. They would share their innermost thoughts with me on life. I felt like they knew me, and I knew them. I think now, I feel I know who I am because before, I didn't know. Now knowing that I am Indigenous, I feel like I belong. I actually finally feel confident. I don't need to try to be that or try to be this. I'm enough. My people are enough. It's almost a peace that has come over me. It's a peace where it tells me it's going to be okay... it's that spirituality that just keeps pushing and tells you to keep going and doing and connecting. I think if children learn to see things differently, then they too can have a sense of peace and see the possibilities of life.

The relationship was a reciprocal way of being and coming to know self, other and the more-than-human. The relationship fostered a co-construction of pedagogy that manifested into meaningful lived experiences, strengthening the adult/child relationship.

I notice time slowing down, and I was able to connect with the children on a different level. We would watch an ant walk across our floor, and it would spark our curiosity. Where was it going, what was it doing here? Does it have a home, a family, on and on. And through this slowing down, we connected. If we're going to do a community walk, how can we build relationships with the people in our community while we're doing this? Not just the people in the community, you know the plants, the land, the birds, the trees. How can we connect with them while we're doing this? Let's build a relationship...with our garden, let's make a garden if we're going to go outside. Let's feed the bees. Let's feed the birds. Let's feed squirrels. They need our help. We have responsibilities to them. It's reciprocal. We need to help them, and they're helping us... That connection with everything. I really wanted the children to know their community. I think that was the big thing. "Hey, grass. We see you. You're trying to peek

through. We see you." That tree over there, let's get to know that tree. There are always opportunities to connect with land.

Greenwood (2013) describes this as "content is process, and process is content" (p.100).

The relationship is one of the foundations of Indigenous pedagogy. The coming to know self-in-relation allows engagement with human and more-than-human to establish a reality through connection. To understand the Indigenous world of seeing is to understand "self, spirit and the unknown" (Ermine 1995, p.108). The ethical space where the IECE and child meet allows identity (self) to be whole, resulting in a holistic relationship. It is the IECE's identity that roots them into relational formation. The IECE recognized relationships to self, child, family, community and land as being powerful. It is through the interconnections that knowledge is able to form.

In the stories shared, the IECE understood their way of being and knowing is different than mainstream practice. Their way of calling attention to the interconnected relationship was from their Indigenous worldview. There seemed to be a conscious awareness about developing relationships in this manner with people, land and the more than human, which could transform the child's perspective. By engaging in the relation, there was a hope that the child may acquire a different way of thinking and interacting with others and with the earth.

To have them have a relationship with the land, if they cultivate it, it doesn't matter where they go. They're always going to be connected to the land. No one can take that away from them. And if that's the one thing I could do in my life, then to me, I am honoured because we're all part of the earth, and it's just really special.

The littlest actions of like teaching compassion. Everything has a place to exist and a life. We think of our life easily, but to extend that to others, a person or plant or animal and they have a life. It's a life! It's animated, and once it's gone, it's gone, and that's really sad. It's really precious and the sense all life is precious, and that's why I think when they're in nature, they have the opportunity to feel their bones. They have the opportunity to feel their sweat to understand what their body feels. What their body feels like with trees, with bark, with soft grass. They have the language and appreciation for it too... That's where I see like the learning is just being there and having your body and having

that experience one-on-one. That progression, that change because children notice the smallest things. They'll notice a mushroom that grows overnight. If you visit the same places with them and that teaches attention. Mostly it teaches them relationship, and that's so important.

We start to kind of prepare children for what, in our society, success looks like—somebody who can attain all this. But by getting that success, we ruined the relationship with Mother Earth. I think a lot of mental health problems and a lot of what we see today is basically a reflection of humanity's need to be in connection and being in communion with Earth. It's just a cause and effect. Until people realize as a whole that we are actually all connected, then it's going to be like that. That's why the children are so important to empower because they take it in. They're going to see the future we're not going to see. We gotta give them all these gifts.

Essentially, the IECE/child relationship was creating an "ambidextrous consciousness" between Eurocentric paradigms and an Indigenous consciousness (Kovach, 2013, p.115). Ambidextrous consciousness is the ability to see two worldviews and move between them (Kovach, 2013). The IECE trusted the relationship with the child would make space for Indigenous knowledge. The relationship resulted in rich experiences and knowledge constructed through an Indigenous worldview. Relationships are a way to share our knowledge of humanity and construct a participatory consciousness with self, others, and land. Making this knowledge accessible to children, the educators expressed hope that a new story might emerge.

The meeting of two individuals in the ethical space encourages a holistic relationship with the capacity to heighten the realization of human potential. The depth of the IECE/child relationship transforms the learning environment. The educator and child were engaged in the construction of relational knowledge. The relationship became a site for perspective and knowledge system exchange. Relationships developed in an ethical space disturbs Eurocentric practices within the childcare system by asking how we relate to one another, how we learn to think together and rethinks how we interact with one another. Through the building of

relationships in this between space, the IECEs were answering these questions in the hope of transforming the child's capacity to see different perspectives.

Land

Knowledge is formed in the West. With this direction, I posed the question, "What knowledge helps to hold the space for Indigenous ECEs?" The story of land illuminated.

Our relationships with each other, with the land, with the water, with the medicines. When I see children interested in a particular subject, that's what really drives those other pieces. So, you know children are fascinated by something that they find outside, and I'll share even a bit of my teachings about that thing. Then we explored in other ways so that we are building relationships with that previously unknown thing that the children are just fascinated by. Emerging Indigenous pedagogies. It's all woven together. It's just so real connecting with Earth. I think for anyone, you don't have to be Indigenous to want to connect with Earth. We would sit down on the carpet and do something along the lines of a Thanksgiving addressed⁴. Let's say good morning to the animals, then say good morning to people and friends.

Being on the land was a place most IECE felt comfortable while in mainstream childcare. Holding space for Indigenous knowledge while on the land was natural. Land teachings shape the Indigenous identity; they are embodied in the individual (Simpson, 2014). Each IECE carried a form of land teachings within herself.

Indigenous ways of knowing and being are our inherent ways of building relationships, communication, and learning. Seeing how learning relationships in the world and seeing the world around us and how we work and walk with people's, places, things. An interconnection of everything. That was me. The stuff that I have is within me. Innate. It's just what I learned from my family, my teachings and what I was brought up with. I do feel more comfortable (being outside). I don't think it was like an intentional thing. I guess it is so ingrained in what I'm doing... It's just not something that I really think about because it's kind of second nature.

⁴ A Haudenosaunee opening greeting acknowledging the people, the land, the animals and the Creator. The greeting expresses the interconnectedness and interdependence between all. It shows gratitude and places humans into a reciprocal relationship with all relations.

Knowledge embodiment compels an individual to share and pass on their way of knowing and being (Simpson, 2014). It was important for the IECE to support the child in developing their own relationship with the land. A land relationship becomes entangled in the child's being and becoming. The IECEs strengthened the child's relation with land by providing opportunities to think with, on and about land. Engagement on land created relational knowledge while supporting a web of relationships to self, others, and the more than human (Simpson, 2014).

I try to show the children, there are other species that live within our environment, and those plants and animals have a purpose and a life that we're all living on Mother Earth together and need each other.

There's just something that's more in nature. I think they benefit from being outside. The more time that they spend, the better. I also think in all seasons. In winter, they just learn to put on layers so that they can enjoy themselves. When we go outside, and we're in that different world. Snow and ice, it's different. The children have the ability to interact with that type of environment. They understand what that's like. It's not learned through a book. Yes, books are important, but I think real-life experiences are more important. Everything has a life. Everything that can be taught in the classroom, Mother Earth tells us. She shows us everything. I know that I find it easier to be outside. I find that Mother Earth just unveils herself to the kids in a natural way. To me, it seems like a deeper set of learning... I think that nature, for me, teaches you how to be a human first.

Daily experiences on the land increase the capacity to see all life's interconnection (Simpson, 2014). It is within daily practices that transformative change can shift thinking (Corntassel & Harbarger, 2019). The IECE was nurturing a child's connection to land. Their daily experiences exposed the child to other ways of being—the engagement of ethical space while on the land allowed for the transfer of Indigenous knowledge. The educator and child relationship on the land offered an opportunity to make and remake connections and knowledge. Meaning making was an active process that strengthened relationships with all relations.

One winter, every morning, a blue jay would come to our playground. One child was concerned about what it ate during the winter. I thought this was a great opportunity to learn about giving, helping and responsibility. So, we began to leave bird seed out. One

morning, we laid down our morning offering of seed and sat in the snowbank. The children were looking all over the sky for the blue jay, and out of nowhere, it appeared in front of us, eating the seed. The children's eyes lit up. We tried to be really quiet so as not to scare it away. But our excitement got the best of us, and we just began to laugh. The blue jay was only there for a second, but that second lasted forever. For weeks, that is all they could talk about was this blue jay. Our whole curriculum became about winter birds and animals. What do they eat? What do they do in winter? The children started to notice the playground was full of life, even in winter. It's moments like that that make me realize how much the land is a teacher.

I would go into nature. I would find calmness and peace in nature. So, for me to give that gift to the children. To have them have that relationship with the land. When I say the land, it's everything. It's the elements, its water, its wind. They're just such a part of me. I greet the land... it is important for children to understand their spirituality. To understand, not just that they're part of the land, but understand that they can call upon the land. They can actually have a mutual relationship...It's greater than, I don't even know how to put it into words. It's just really, really, big.

Developing relationships with people and land places you in a reciprocal relation, resulting in the sense of responsibility and respect. The educator/child relationship on the land engaged the Indigenous perspective of caring for all living becomes a part of the child's knowing. Land relationships push back on child-centred approaches in ECE. Placing the child within relational practices transforms self to place.

Simpson (2014) in discussing on Indigenous pedagogy states, “ Not just a pedagogy, it’s how to live.”(p.18). Indigenous pedagogy develops a set of relationships that engage the spiritual and natural world (Styres, 2017). The relationship with land is intimate (Simpson, 2014; Styres, 2017). It is both physical and spiritual. The majority of the IECs spoke to the land and used the term Mother, Mother Earth or Mother Nature.

I always encourage them to respect Mother nature. And that's how I described it as Mother nature walked throughout our playground. We would be blessed with spiders. Whenever we had any creatures, any worms, any bugs or anything, I would encourage them to have respect for them. To be kind to them. It was conscious. I talked about it. I would just keep it short, saying Mother Earth gives us so much. I said this is where our vegetables grow. This is what feeds our animals. This is where our house is. That's what I would share with them about Mother Nature. They would go home. It was funny because sometimes you don't think they're listening to you, but then some of the parents would

come back and say, I appreciate you explaining that to them. They're telling me about there's Mother Nature out there and to be kind to Mother Nature.

[In nature] don't feel lost because look up. There's the sky. There's the ground. You're here. You're right here. You can't be lost. This is Mother. You're in Mother. It's like that, and I teach the children. To me, this is real. Mother Earth is real. She is real. She's the most real thing. We're connected. We are. They're part of Mother Earth. They're part of nature itself. So, they're to be revered and respected.

The way that I am with the children, I've always given animation to everything. I've always told them that there's life within the rocks. I think that's just the way I am in the way that I say hi to trees. The way that I speak of things. In the way that I call on things. That's just the way I perceive them, the way that they are part of my life. So, I feel very comfortable speaking like that with the children and sharing that with them. It's important that they know where they come from and know where they are on this planet as beings. They're not alone. We are part of Mother. She is alive. We are alive.

Everything's alive. It's you know one can't be without the other. It fills me with, the word that comes to mind, is confidence, but not in an arrogant way. It gives me confidence that I belong. That this is my Earth, and I belong to the Earth. With that confidence of knowing that I belong, I feel like I can take on anything. The Earth, with all its riches, is here. We just have to understand how to be in constant communion. I have this beautiful relationship with Mother Earth. It's a gift I want to share.

In the ethical space, the IECE shared their perspective of Mother Earth and land with the child. The educator/child relationship extends to include human, Mother Earth and the more than human. In Indigenous thought, it is our relationships that create reality. Land in all of its complexity becomes a place to share and make knowledge in relation. Relationships expand, and a web of interconnection frames the made space ensuring the IECE can hold it.

Spirit

I turn to the north to pose my final question completing the cycle of analysis. The north represents wisdom. My question is, "What wisdom does the IECE hold in making and holding space?" The space lit up with stories of the child's spirit.

When you see a child splashing around in the sink... they're engaging their spirit with the spirit of water. This is something that is beautiful, and this is what childhood is.

Each child arrives with their own unique gifts, and it is our responsibility to uncover what those gifts are and celebrate them.

Relationships with children have always been super easy because they get it, their closest to Spirit. I don't have to explain to them why the sound of the wind rustling in the leaves

is like a kind of magic in itself. You feel connected when you are really rooted in those experiences with nature.

I think it's a lot of understanding and respecting that children have their own knowledge. They, in my worldview, they're the center of the community. They are the closest to the spirit world. There's so much that I can learn from them. I want to give them the freedom to be able to experience life the way they want to and just guide them in directions. I can see their spirit when they discover something new. It's in their laughter. It's in their excitement to go for a walk. It's everywhere if you look.

IECEs understand spirituality was fundamental component in the early years. The child, in the Indigenous worldview, is a sacred gift (Cajete, 2017). They come with gifts and hold teachings. Childhood is marked by a connection to Spirit (Cajete, 2017). The adult (educator) role is to support the child in becoming a complete person through the nurturing of the spirit (Cajete, 2017). The spirit is nourished through being in relation (Ritskes, 2011).

The child is a very special gift. That we have a lot to learn from, they come here with a very strong identity and sense of self, and it's our job to help foster that. They have a lot to teach us just as much as we teach them. They're like really gifted, little mini-Elders. I think that spirituality is a thing that has been excluded. I think that has happened because, like when we think of spirituality, a lot of the time, it's just wrapped up with religion. To me, spiritualism is not religion. A spirit is the spirit of a life force that dwells within the body. When I look at children, I see their Spirits. There's something within them. To me, they are as a flower, as a tree, they all have something organic within them. We all are connected that way. It is only when we start thinking of all these borders and labels and all these constrictions where we start to compartmentalize. I think that being with the children and allowing children to explore, to know that they are part of everything. I feel itself is a gift because then they understand themselves as being organic as part of nature. It gives them a different lens to navigate and to be in relationships with all. I think that's very important for children.

It is the nurturing of the child's spirit that ultimately engages the making and holding of ethical space. It is within the ethical space where the adult and child can enter bringing their full self. When adults make space for a child's authentic expression, they accept and nurture a child's spirituality (Cole, 2011).

I can see their Spirit. I get a sense of what their Spirit is, and I try and nurture that. Then I would try and speak to that. That's something I can't really explain. You see the spirits;

the spirits are there. Sometimes they're rambunctious. Sometimes they're quiet. You can get a sense of where their spirit is.

Spiritual development is enhanced by relations and experiences (Cole, 2011). The spirit of the child grows when there is a sense of belonging. A rich environment of relationships that acknowledge and provide expression and critical reflection opportunities supports spiritual growth (Cole, 2011; Ritskes, 2011). The spiritual self begins as an inward experience that becomes relational to others and the more than human. The spirit of the child is a web of relational connections with all their relations, self, family, community, and land (Cole, 2011; Ritskes, 2011).

The spirit of the child very important. It's relationship building, and it's acknowledging that they're there. If you don't acknowledge that you're there, then you don't exist. So, you know to acknowledge someone's spirit is to bring them into existence.

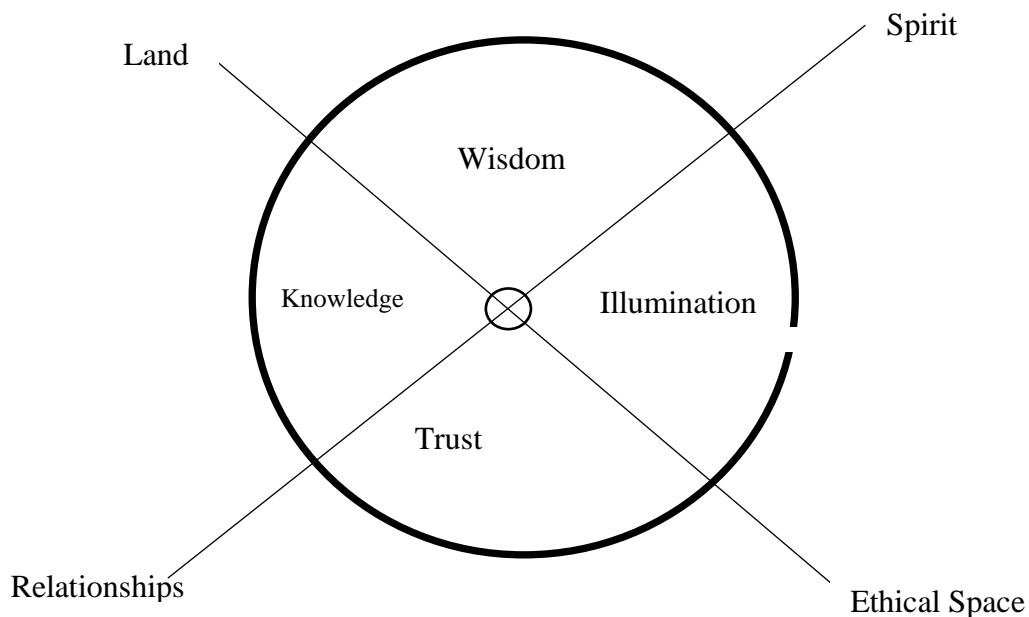
The IECE could see the spirit of the child, for she makes space for the child to be fully actualized. Children need to be able to explore their spiritual identity through moments of discovery and expression. The child's spirit can be seen in moments of wonderment. The IECE and child were on the land, looking closely at Mother Earth, who has an endless supply of awe. It is within the space 'between' educator and child, becomes full of potential and possibility. It is here the child is truly capable and competent. The ethical space of engagement ensures there is space for the spiritual child's being and becoming.

Conclusion

The IECE was making and holding space by engaging an ethical space based on mutual respect. The space allowed for relationships to all relations to be established and maintained through land engagement. Land engagement offered opportunities for the construction of knowledge between the IECE and child, strengthening their relationship and upholding the

ethical space. It was within this space the spirit of the child blossomed. The ethical space is where two entities meet, allowing for the actualization of self. The reciprocal relationship of being and consistent affirmation nourishes the spirit. The spirit of the child had room to develop in the ethical space. Engaging in the wonderment of Mother Earth allowed the IECE to see the child's spirit, reaffirming the making of ethical space. In the making of space, all components, ethical space, relationship, land and spirit of the child are present, creating a holistic environment where the educator can hold the space. The making and holding space is a cycle of affirmation of ethical space, relationships, land and the spirit of the child (see figure II: Analysis). All elements of the analysis were interconnected. Many of the stories shared contained all of the elements. Ethical space, relationships, land, and the child's spirit work together as a whole in the making and holding space.

Figure II: Analysis



The smoke has faded, and the answers are before us. Indigenous ECEs are making and holding space in mainstream childcare by implementing an ethical space of engagement, where relationships with self, educator/child, family, community, and Mother Earth can flourish. Being in relation enables the co-learning and construction of knowledge on the land. It is within the ethical space that the spirituality of the child is nourished and nurtured.

Faint crackling noises can be heard in the wind. Following them, we come to the northern doorway of Action.

Chapter 4. Wisdom

It is in the doing that life lives.

Action



The crackling of cedar in the fire is like laughter, and it is to remind us of the goodness of life. Cedar is the medicine for restoration and healing. Indigenous research is for the betterment of the Indigenous lived life. It is in wisdom where the original vision becomes a reality. In this chapter, I discuss ways the research may be actualized to support the growth of IECs. I also speak to my

transformation.

Rightsholder

The oral history story was the root of how this research was capable of making and remaking meaning. The participants' storied experience about the lived experience of being an Indigenous ECE was vital to this research. Each of the participants was an active agent in a relationship built on narrative. Therefore, their story is theirs, and as such, they become a rightsholder in this research. As a rightsholder, the participants were presented the initial findings during a Zoom session in December 2020. The feedback from the participants ensures relational accountability (Wilson, 2008). The participants determined the accuracy of the analysis and had the opportunity to elaborate upon the idea (Wilson, 2008). The session made space for the collective to form a relationship. The findings were discussed at length resulting in a collective analysis. Additional stories were told to deepen the understandings of the findings. The collective wisdom of Indigenous educators validated the findings during the Zoom session.

Dissemination

Relationships are the foundation of Indigenous research. A digital copy of this major research paper will be sent to each organization and community that support me on this journey. A summary of the findings was presented to the participants in December 2020. The PowerPoint used in the presentation was shared with the participants. A digital copy of this major research paper will be offered to each participant. At this moment, I am willing to speak and share the research with interested communities.

Scope, Limitation and Implications for Future Research

Research on the IECE's pedagogical practice is limited. This research filled a gap in the literature regarding IECEs in mainstream child care. However, this research limitation was a small sample size of ten participants living in Southern Ontario, and further research is necessary to confirm the making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogical practices is universal.

This research focused on the lived experiences of IECEs in southern Ontario, and future research should include IECE across Ontario. It is also recommended to explore the IECE experience in both mainstream and Indigenous child care.

In this study, a majority of the IECEs indicted, leaving mainstream child care to pursue positions within Indigenous communities. Future research could be done on the rate and reasons for the departure to understand the phenomena.

This research focused on making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy, future research, with the involvement of IECE, should investigate Indigenous pedagogy in the early years and child care.

Recommendations

Four recommendations have emerged through this research. The first is the establishment of an Indigenous community of practice. A grassroots network that supports the IECE. It is recommended the community of practice be established and maintained by IECES. The network would connect IECES locally and provincially. It will allow the IECE to have a knowledgeable support system that could help her/him navigate the early childhood sector while affirming their pedagogy. Connecting at a larger scope would promote a collective Indigenous voice within the early childhood learning and care field. It is within the community of practice where IECES can self-determine their practice and pedagogy. The Indigenous community of practice should be open to all Indigenous people who work with children. The voices of those working inside their community and those working on the edge in mainstream child care are both valid. The coming together in one collective voice will enable the Indigenous knowledge and ways of being with children to enlarge. We are stronger together.

The second is offering professional development that focuses on the needs of the IECE. Professional development should be able to answer the localized needs and interests of the IECE. Simultaneously, other professional development investigates broader topics that affect a large group or dive deeper into Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

The third recommendation is offering professional development courses on the ethical space for ECEs working within the field. This will increase the awareness of ethical space while establishing rules of engagement. Raising the social consciousness of ethical space will lead to transformative change within the ECE field.

The last recommendation is for University and College ECE, child development and education programs to offer courses that focus on the First Nation, Métis and Inuit worldviews of

walking with children, building ethical spaces within the early years, relational thought and Land as teacher. The courses offered must be a deep dive into the beauty of Indigenous knowledge and ways of being while speaking to implementing these ways of being in current practice.

The implementation of all recommendations would significantly change the IECs' professional live. These recommendations also have the potential to transform the early childhood learning and caring field. Each recommendation offers endless possibilities in reimagining how we create space within the early years and may lead to a new way of being with children.

Personal Journey Closing

This research depicts two full journeys around the Circle. However, the actual journey involved walking a circular path for many moons. Around and around, spiraling into a familiar unknown seeking an answer. The journey transformed me in ways no words can accurately describe. What I can say for certain my identity, as a Native American woman/educator/scholar, has been strengthened. I have learned to fully embracing and trust my inner ancestral knowledge.

Last year, when I embarked on this quest, I knew I wanted this research to use an Indigenous methodology. I wanted to connect with Indigenous Knowledge and ways of knowing. As I wrote this MRP, I felt a constant inner resistance. My writing continuously fell apart. Reflecting on the experience I can now recognize why, I was trying to fit Indigenous Knowledge, ways of knowing and being into a western research formula. Instead of connecting with this beautiful knowledge, I was constantly whittling it down to fit into a western paradigm. The experience was frustrating. As a graduate student, I felt I was standing on a cliff. I could easily turn back, make my research, myself small to fit, collect my degree and be on my way. Standing in that spot was challenging for so many reasons. For a moment I stepped back thinking there must be another way. My work continued to fall apart. I felt like a toddler with a shape

sorter trying endlessly to fit a circle into a rectangle. Like a child, I eventually realized a full circle will never fit into a rectangle. A circle belongs in a circle. This research is Indigenous Knowledge.

Taking a huge breath, I turned and courageously ran, leaping off the cliff. I landed firmly in a space that I have always known. A place that has been waiting for me. The Seven Grandfather teachings surrounded me. Love and Trust held my hand and at times carried me as I walked further away from the imposed western worldview/academy.

I embraced an Indigenous worldview and research paradigm. It was a conscious decision not to compare the Indigenous paradigm and research methodology to the western. Allowing it complete autonomy. In this research, I tried to use Indigenous scholars, and literature to support my arguments, and when I used literature from the western perspective it was to support the knowledge I was constructing in the Indigenous paradigm. I deliberately choose not to use a decolonization framework. I wanted this research to move beyond the colonial binary pinning Indigenous and western worldviews into positions of opposition. I felt my responsibility was to the (re)claiming, (re)emergence and (re)surgency of Indigenous Knowledge. My hope was to capture the richness and beauty of the Indigenous way of being with children.

Ten participants answered my call for IECs to share their lived experiences of making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy. Their stories were absolutely breathtaking. In the interviews, I found myself wanting to be a child in their classroom, to experience their pedagogy, but more importantly to be fully seen by an educator. Many of the IECs stated they made this space for all children for they never had it. They are amazing, generous teachers. They possess something truly special. If I had one wish, I would wish every child could experience the Indigenous pedagogy described in this research.

Each IECE shared a piece of their heart, gifting it so willing to me. I am touched by their kindness and overcome with gratitude for their generosity. I have gently held each one, captivated by their abundance. It is with honour I place each precious gift into my bundle. I will always cherish and respect it.

The IECes' stories enabled me to gain insight into Indigenous pedagogical ways of making and holding space. Their stories transported me to a space where time/place merge. While walking in that space, I was able to reclaim a very old teaching, the ethical space. It was the missing piece in my conscious knowledge, and it is the answer to my research question. It is the element that completes the Circle. It is where Indigenous pedagogy begins.

The pedagogy and knowledge shared in this research are the traditional teachings of this land. I have been in the ECE field for 25 years, witnessing new approaches emerge every few years. The early years and child care sector is seeking something and looking elsewhere for a pedagogical approach that will fit the Canadian context. I say look beneath your feet you are walking on the pedagogical teachings of this land. These teachings are for everyone. Mother Earth does not see Indigenous or Settler, she sees children, human. It is time for us to see the same. The ethical space of engagement offers us a path to true reconciliation and a new way of being within Canadian early years and child care. I call upon the ECE field, at the very least, to start making and holding space for IECes in mainstream child care, as they practice Indigenous pedagogy.

As I complete the Circle, I take one final look back on the journey, it is the IECes' stories about their pedagogical practice that captures my awe. Their ways of being and walking with children reaffirms in me our Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge are beautiful.

Miigwech. Miigwech. Miigwech. Miigwech.



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APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

This is the interview guide for the semi-structured interview. The major topics have been underlined. Each topic will be discussed in the interview. Below each topic is a series of **sample questions**. Follow up questions can occur during the interview. The major topics are in order of importance. The questions in italics will be asked in some form during the interview.

Opening / Introduction Questions

Do you have your ECE diploma/degree? Are you registered as an RECE with the College of ECE?

How long have you been teaching?

What age level did you teach?

What motivated you to be an ECE? What do you love about being an ECE?

Indigenous Pedagogy

What does the term “Indigenous pedagogy” mean to you?

Have you been able to practice Indigenous pedagogy in your work? How? If not, why?

Have you been able to name it? If so, how has it been received? If not, why?

What does it mean to you to make space for Indigenous knowledge, ways and being in a child care centre?

Describe an experience of how you have made space for Indigenous pedagogy. If you are unable to practice Indigenous pedagogy, please speak to the barriers.

What does it mean to hold a space for Indigenous pedagogy?

Are you able to hold this space for Indigenous knowledge within your classroom? If so, how and if not, what are the barriers?

Can you give examples of how you are maintaining Indigenous pedagogy within their workplace?

What does culturally appropriate child care mean to you? Why is it important?

How did you make curriculum culturally appropriate?

Identity

Are you able to self-identify as an Indigenous person in your centre? If not, why?

How does your Indigenous identity inform your practice?

Are there cultural teachings/values that guide your practice?

Relationality

Is relationship building important to practice? Why?

How do you build relationships with children, family, community, and land?

Racism

Have you experienced any incidents that you would identify as racist? Please describe

How did you respond when faced with racism?

How did your centre address racism?

Land Base

Do you practice a land-based approach when working with children? Can you describe an experience where you feel it was successful?

Do you feel more comfortable inside or outside? What is the difference? Why?

Can you describe how you interact with children while outside?

How do you foster a relationship with the land and child? Can you give an example?

Teaching Philosophy

Finish the following statements:

My teaching philosophy is ...

My view of the educator is ...

My view of the child is ...

Concluding / Existing Reflections

What other issues did we not address that you think are important and relevant in research about Indigenous ECEs working in mainstream child care?

Appendix B: Indigenous Communities/Organizations

Community/Organization	Support
Association of Early Childhood Educators in Ontario	Recruitment support
Métis Nation of Ontario	Statement of support
Métis Nation of Ontario, Peterborough & District Wapiti Region Six Council	Statement of support (Oral Consent to support recruitment)
Métis Nation of Ontario, Grand River Métis Council	Support granted (Oral Consent to support recruitment)
Niagara Chapter-Native Women Inc.	Verbal Support given (Oral Consent to support recruitment)
Ryerson Aboriginal Student Services	Support granted
Toronto York Region Métis	Social Media Support
Nshwaasnangong Child Care and Family Centre	Verbal support given (Oral Consent to support recruitment)
Facebook Indigenous Groups	Post social media flyer

Appendix C: Recruitment Materials

Facebook

20 Research Participants Needed

Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Mainstream Child Care

Is this you?

- 18 years of age or older
- Identify as First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal or Urban Aboriginal
- Worked in a licensed child care as an Early Childhood Educator
- Live in Southern Ontario
- Available to participate in an interview via Zoom

If you answered yes to all of the above, you may volunteer to participate in my study about Indigenous Early Childhood Educators working child care.

If you are interested in participating in my study, your participation in this study would involve one Zoom interview that will take about one hour. The interview will be recorded.

After participating in this study, you will receive a \$10 virtual gift card from Tim Horton's as gratitude.

If you are interested in participating in this study or if you would like more information, please contact:

Maya-Rose Simon, BCD (*Hons.*), RECE
MA Early Childhood Studies, 2020
maya.simon@ryerson.ca

Social Media Wording

Hello everyone!

I am a student at Ryerson University, completing a master's degree in Early Childhood Studies. As a part of the requirements of my degree, I have chosen to complete a research project exploring Indigenous early childhood educators in mainstream (non-Indigenous) child care. If you know someone who might be willing to participate please share this recruitment post with him or her.

If you self-identify as First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal or Urban Aboriginal in Southern Ontario, are 18 years of age or older, work(ed) in a licenced child care and interested in sharing your experience, you are invited to participate in this research.

Please contact me by email at maya.simon@ryerson.ca or through direct message on Facebook. I will send you the information letter and consent form so that you can get a better idea of what participating in the study would involve.

If you choose to participate you will be interviewed via Zoom. After participating in this study, you will receive a virtual \$10 Tim Horton's gift card as a thank you.

Please don't comment on this post in order to protect the identity of potential participants. Please contact me directly if you have any questions.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson REB (REB 2020-180)

20 PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

FOR RESEARCH IN INDIGENOUS EARLY CHILDHOOD EDCATORS IN MAINSTREAM CHILD CARE

Are You:

- 18 years of age or older
- Identify as First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal or Urban Aboriginal
- Worked in a licensed child care as an Early Childhood Educator
- Live in Southern Ontario
- Available to participate in an interview via Zoom

If you answered yes to the above noted questions you are invited to volunteer in this study about the Indigenous educators' experience in mainstream childcare.

This research is part of my master's degree expectation.

You will be asked to participate in a recorded zoom interview.

Your participation will involve a one-hour interview about your experiences within a mainstream child care.

In appreciation of your time, you will receive \$10 virtual gift card from Tim Horton's.

If you are interested in participating in this study or for more information, please contact:

Maya-Rose Simon, BCD (*Hons.*), RECE
MA Early Childhood Studies student, 2020
maya.simon@ryerson.ca

This research study has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board [REB 2020-180]



Maya-Rose Simon

Email: maya.simon@ryerson.ca

September 7, 2020

Dear Indigenous Early Childhood Educator (ECE),

My name is Maya-Rose Simon. I am a student at Ryerson University in the School of Early Childhood. I am contacting you to see if you might be interested in participating in a research study. I am looking for 20 First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal or Urban Aboriginal people who have worked in a licensed child care setting in Southern Ontario.

This research is being done as part of my master's project and my supervisor's name is Dr. Nicole Land. The focus of the research is to investigate how Indigenous early childhood educators are making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy in mainstream child care.

If you agree to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in a recorded one-hour interview over Zoom. Participants will also be able to review responses through audio transcribes to ensure accuracy and that the researcher has captured the message that they were meaning to convey. As gratitude for your time, you will receive a \$10 Tim Horton's virtual gift card.

If you are interested in more information about the research or would like to volunteer, please reply to maya.simon@ryerson.ca

The research has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board [REB 2020-180].

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Maya-Rose Simon, BCD (*Hons.*), RECE
MA Early Childhood Studies student, 2020
maya.simon@ryerson.ca

RYERSON UNIVERSITY
Letter of Information and Consent



Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Mainstream Child Care
Letter of Information and Consent Agreement

You are being invited to participate in a research study. Please read this consent form to fully understand what your participation will involve. Before you consent to participate, please ask any questions to be sure you understand what your participation will involve.

TITLE OF RESEARCH: Indigenous early childhood educators in mainstream childcare

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

This research study is being conducted by Maya Simon, Masters student, under the supervision Dr. Nicole Land, from School of Early Childhood Studies at Ryerson University.

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact maya.simon@ryerson.ca

1. PURPOSE OF STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study about developing Indigenous knowledge pedagogies in mainstream childcare. You have been invited because you are an Indigenous early childhood educator.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) final report produced 94 calls to action, under the Legacy sub-section Education, 12 recommendations were given. The last recommendation was “We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments to develop culturally appropriate early childhood education programs for Aboriginal families.” (TRC, 2015, 205). First Nation, Métis and Inuit populations understand the vital role quality early childhood programs could offer in supporting child development and rebuilding a sense of community (TRC, 2015, 205). First Nations, Métis and Inuit view children as an essential element in a community and believe in the power children have in transforming a community.

The TRC calls to action is advocating for Canada to make space for Indigenous people, knowledge, ways and practices. The intention of this research is to explore how Indigenous early childhood educators are trying to make space for Indigenous pedagogy within a colonial institution such as an early childhood school. As an Anishinaabe, tribally enrolled member of the Chippewa Tribe and Métis, I wonder how Indigenous early childhood educators are making and holding space for Indigenous pedagogy within mainstream childcare.

2. WHAT PARTICIPATION MEANS

To volunteer as a participant in this research you must be

- Over the age of 18 years old
- Self-identify as First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Aboriginal or Urban Aboriginal,
- Worked as an educator in a mainstream (non-Indigenous) licensed childcare centre
- Live in Southern Ontario.

Participation in the study will involve the following:

Your involvement will be through a commitment to attend a virtually interview. The interview will be schedule at your earliest convenience during the month of September or October 2020. Each interview will be conducted on the Zoom platform. It will last approximately 1 hour in length. The interview will be recorded.

Prior to logging into the scheduled Zoom interview, please choose a location that maintains aural and visual privacy thus ensuring the interview remains confidential.

The interview will discuss your ability to practice Indigenous pedagogy within a mainstream childcare. The purpose of this discussion will be to make Indigenous pedagogy visible while deepening the knowledge of how Indigenous educators are practicing Indigenous pedagogy within child care.

As a participant, you will have the opportunity to review your responses to ensure accuracy and that the research has captured the message you were conveying. This will be done through reviewing the audio transcription of the Zoom interview. The audio transcription will be emailed to you for approval. The email will be password protected to ensure confidentiality. The participant will have one week to privately review transcripts and clarify any response on the transcription. After one week, it will be assumed the participant is satisfied with the transcription.

You will be invited to a Zoom meeting in early December, where the researcher will present the findings of the research. You will have an opportunity to share your ideas, feeling or opinions on the findings and recommend adjustments.

The primary investigator's Master Research Project oral defense will be in January 2021. You will have the option to attend through Zoom, an email will be sent to all participants closer to the date. The final report will be made available to participants on Ryerson University Library Digital Repository <https://digital.library.ryerson.ca/>

The researcher will share with others the results of this project in the following ways:

- a. In Master of Art in Early Childhood Studies thesis
- b. Through presentation or exhibit, academic and professional conferences.
- c. In publication, for example professional journals or book chapters.

3. POTENTIAL BENEFITS

The possible benefits of this study are it may add to the body of knowledge about how Indigenous educators are creating space for Indigenous pedagogy within early childhood education. The participant may provide insight into issues, Indigenous educators are experiencing within child care The educator may gain further insight into their own practice of Indigenous pedagogy within mainstream child care. The participant may find comfort in the

knowledge there are other Indigenous educators practicing Indigenous pedagogy within mainstream child care. Please note the researcher cannot guarantee any direct benefits from participating in this research.

4. WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TO YOU AS A PARTICIPANT

There might be a psychological risk for the educators during the interview. The participant may have the natural feeling of anger, upset or uncomfortable feelings while discussing negative experiences. There may also be social risk for the educators during the interview. Educators may feel their current practices of Indigenous pedagogy might lessen their reputation. The psychological and social risk will be managed in the interview by reminding those participating at the beginning of the interview that the opinions and ideas shared are confidential.

The interviews will begin and end with the tradition of smudging. The smudge bowl will be filled with good intentions for the participant and the interview.

If you feel uncomfortable at any time, you may choose to inform the researcher, choose not to share or can leave the Zoom session by clicking the leave meeting button. This will minimize the risk. A list of counseling services will be available and if you feel more comfortable speaking with an Elder please do so.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality will be upheld throughout the process. Pseudonyms will be assigned to the data. Only pseudonyms will be used in the Master Research Project (MRP) and any publications. The interview will be video-recorded, and the audio transcribed. The participants have the right to review the transcripts. The video files and transcripts will be stored on the primary investigator's Ryerson University Google drive. A two-step password process secures the drive. The raw data will be used by the primary investigator and reviewed only when necessary by the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Nicole Land. The video files will only be used for the purposed of the Master Research Project. The raw data will be kept for two years and destroyed thereafter.

6. INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATION

To show gratitude for sharing your experiences and story, a \$10.00 virtual gift card from Tim Hortons will be offered.

7. COMPENSATION FOR INJURY

By agreeing to participate in this research, you are not giving up or waiving any legal right in the event that you are harmed during the research.

8. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Participation in this research is completely voluntary. You can choose whether to be in this research or not. If any question makes you uncomfortable, you can skip that question. You may

stop participating at any time. If you choose to stop participating, you may also choose to have your data removed from the research. If you wish to have your information removed please inform the researcher. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University or the research investigator, Maya Simon.

9. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY

If you have any questions about the research, you may contact:

Maya Simon
maya.simon@ryerson.ca

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board [REB 2020-180].

If you have questions regarding your rights as a participant in this study, please contact:

Research Ethics Board
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University 350 Victoria Street
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3
416-979-5042
rebchair@ryerson.ca

Consent

Project Title: **Indigenous Early Childhood Educators in Mainstream Child Care**

Principal Investigator:

Maya Simon, RECE, BCD (Hons),
MAECS student, Ryerson University 2020
Email: maya.simon@ryerson.ca

I have read the Letter of Information and agree to participate.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

I agree to be the video recording of the interview for the purposes of this study. I understand how these recordings will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

I agree to have the audio of the video recording transcribed for the purpose of this study. I understand how the transcriptions will be stored and destroyed.

Signature of Participant

Date

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to participate in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdrawal your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement. You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

Name of Participant (please print)

Signature of Participant

Date

Consent II: Tobacco Consent

The following is the script that will be sent with tobacco bundle:

I hope you can support my research into Indigenous early childhood educators practicing Indigenous pedagogy in non-Indigenous childcare settings. I am interested in the exchange of knowledge about how you have created and maintained a space for our Indigenous pedagogy. I am offering you this tobacco for your guidance and our oral story about being an Indigenous educator in a mainstream childcare setting.

*Miigwech.
Maya-Rose Simon*

