

# Indigenizing the Nation

[Original title: Mobilizing Indigenous Epistemologies: Re-visioning Reconciliation]

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I want to thank all those who have contributed to making the conference possible. I am presenting the research that I will be doing for my dissertation and how it aids in the mobilization of Indigenous epistemologies. I will touch on seven topics: (1) location of self; (2) background; (3) justification for the study; (4) research question; (5) prior research; (6) method; and (7) conclusion. Also, I would like to note that I will use the terms Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably.

## 1. Location of Self

My name is Tiffany Prete. I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta where I am specializing in Indigenous Peoples Education. I recently passed my candidacy exam and am preparing to do my data collection. I am a member of the Blood Tribe of the Blackfoot Confederacy. My reserve is located in southwestern Alberta, about 20 minutes north of the United States border. My reserve is the largest land base reserve in Canada. We have a band membership of nearly 13,000 people. My Blackfoot people have reserves in both Canada and the United States. I grew up on an acreage just south of my reserve, on the edge of the foothills, below the rocky mountains, and beside the great plains.

I am also a wife and a mother of two little boys, and I have another child on the way.

## 2. Background

It has been my experience that non-Aboriginal people know very little about Aboriginal peoples and have very few opportunities to learn about Aboriginal peoples. It is my belief that school systems are one avenue for ensuring that the Canadian population learns about Aboriginal peoples, their histories, their cultures, their knowledge systems, and their oppression from colonization. It is my hope that teaching about the cultures, history, and oppression of Aboriginal peoples to the Canadian student population will instill attributes of empathy, respect, and love for the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Without these teachings, it becomes the

societal norm to treat Aboriginal peoples without dignity and with disregard for their humanity.

The Government of Alberta's Alberta Learning ministry (now Alberta Education) created the *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* in 2002. One of its policy statements is to "increase and strengthen knowledge and understanding among all Albertans of First Nations, Métis and Inuit governance, history, treaty and Aboriginal rights, lands, cultures, and languages" (Government of Alberta, 2002, p. 10). A goal of my doctoral study is to determine whether this policy is being successfully implemented and how implementation of this policy might be improved upon. I believe that if this policy were properly executed it would make a difference in the lives of Albertans in how they perceive and treat Aboriginal peoples.

## 3. Justification for the Study

Although Indigenous peoples represent 6.2 percent of the Albertan population in 2011, very few opportunities exist for Albertans to learn about the Indigenous peoples of Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013). Often what people learn about Indigenous peoples is through the media; unfortunately, research has found that much of what is learned are negative stereotypes (Cornelius, 1999; Pewewardy, 2000). Cornelius found that in the United States "ninety five percent of what students know about American Indians was acquired through the media" (p. xi). Currently, the media has the leading role in educating society about Indigenous peoples; therefore, it is important to discover other avenues that can correctly educate society about Indigenous peoples.

Very little empirical research has been undertaken in this area in Canada. My research will address this gap by examining factors that educational school systems may use to increase the understanding of the history and rights of the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Currently, schools and school systems across Canada have taken two different educational approaches to teach their students about Aboriginal peoples: (1) integrated Aboriginal perspectives within the core curriculum; and (2) Aboriginal studies classes. Alberta Education offers both of these educational approaches. The integration of Aboriginal content and perspectives in the regular Kindergarten to Grade 12 program of study is mandatory and has been since 2002. The second educational approach, Aboriginal studies courses, is optional and only available in limited schools (see Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30 <https://education.alberta.ca/aboriginal-studies/programs-of-study/>). It is therefore my intent to determine which of these educational practices makes the most significant difference to student understanding of Aboriginal peoples. As well, I would also like to deter-

mine how well each of these educational practices meets the FNMI education policy originally mandated in 2002.

In Alberta, after the completion of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in March 2014, Alberta's Premier and Education Minister jointly announced that there would be changes to the Alberta Education curriculum by including "enhanced mandatory content" on Aboriginal history, residential schools, and treaties in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum (Government of Alberta, 2014). As of yet, it has not been announced as to how they plan on implementing this. It is my hope that my research will be able to contribute to their decision.

I will examine both of the educational approaches used in Canada to determine which approach makes the most significant difference to student understanding of Aboriginal peoples. The insights gained through this research study have the potential to help restructure policy and practice within the Alberta public school system. This research will also contribute to the literature on Indigenous education in Canada and in an area that is not well researched. The significance of the effects that Canadian Aboriginal history has on student perspectives and understanding has not yet been addressed. Learning mandatory Aboriginal history for all of the students may be a critical factor for Aboriginal students finding success in the public educational school system in Canada.

#### 4. Research Question

The research question that will guide this study is, "How can public school systems efficiently integrate Aboriginal perspectives into the school system?"

#### 5. Prior Research

To date, the majority of research studies have focused on integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum and not on classes specifically devoted to teaching about the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Also, prior research has focused only on teachers' experiences with integrating Aboriginal perspectives in the school curriculum. In my research, I would like to explore both student and teacher perceptions of learning about Aboriginal peoples through examining both educational practices; that is, integrating Aboriginal perspectives in the core curriculum and having Aboriginal studies classes devoted to teaching about Aboriginal peoples.

#### 6. Method

For this research study I will be using an Indigenous research methodology with the addition of a mixed method research design. Previous research studies have not used this methodology or design to examine the phenom-

ena being researched; doing so may shed new light and meaning on this research topic that has not been previously revealed.

This research will be undertaken using four main methods: survey, observations, interviews, and teacher journals. This research will take place in a high school that has a high population of Aboriginal students and that offers courses in both Aboriginal language and Aboriginal studies.

I will be surveying all students from this high school because all the students will have received classroom instruction that has integrated Aboriginal perspectives into the core curriculum since 2002. Additionally, I will be surveying an Aboriginal studies class. The surveys will be used to determine the students' knowledge and attitudes towards Aboriginal peoples. As well, I will be interviewing four students (two who have attended Aboriginal studies and two who have attended an integrated Aboriginal perspectives class) to determine their experiences with each type of educational approach. Additionally, I will be working alongside the Aboriginal studies teacher to determine their experiences and to gain a better understanding of the teaching approach used in the classroom. I will be interviewing the teacher as well as using classroom observations and teacher journals to determine the approach to teaching.

#### 7. Conclusion

I hope that the results from this study will provide evidence of which approach (integration of Aboriginal perspectives in the core curriculum or Aboriginal studies) most successfully meets the requirements of the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* mandate to "increase and strengthen knowledge and understanding among all Albertans of First Nations, Métis and Inuit governance, history, treaty and Aboriginal rights, lands, cultures, and languages" (Government of Alberta, 2002, p. 10).

It is important to discover which approach is most effective, since implementing that approach in the public school systems will help to ensure that all future Albertans possess a greater understanding of Aboriginal peoples, their history, their culture, and their knowledge systems. Through this understanding, I hope that the Albertan population will have a greater love and compassion for Aboriginal peoples. As well, determining an appropriate approach that will be utilized in the public school system is one way to mobilize Indigenous epistemologies, where all students will be exposed to and learn about our knowledge systems.

#### Note

Tiffany Prete defended her doctoral dissertation in December 2017 and convoked in spring 2018. She is currently an adjunct faculty member in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta and a sessional instructor at Red Crow Community College.

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## Beyond the Ebb and Flow of the Powwow Dance Arena: Rekindling the Flame to Cultural Sustainability

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### Background

At the Special Chiefs meeting of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), held from December 10-12, 2012, the commonly accepted term used by many of the Chiefs was *Indigenous people* or their own tribal specific nation identity. For this paper, I will follow the precedent of the AFN and use the term *Indigenous* or Anishinaabe, which is my nation. In the cases where the established term was *Aboriginal*, I will do so accordingly, such as the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) report.

This paper provides an investigative and theoretical assessment of a contemporary phenomenon of Indigenous people: the powwow. This research is a preliminary study for establishing an inquiry into cultural sustainability within the confines of the cultural concept of powwows. Powwow has provided an intersection for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous traditional and contemporary knowledge of the 21st century.

My position that leads to a level of inquiry is first as an Anishinaabe, as a single parent of three adult children, and as a *Nokomis* (grandmother) of seven grandchildren. Next, is the realization of the impact the intergenerational trauma of the Indian residential school (IRS) experience has had on the contemporary Anishinaabe family. Based on my life as a dancer and also being involved in cultural practices, an inquiry developed as to whether powwow could be a linkage to cultural sustainability. Finally, the inquiry is from an educator's standpoint, which is why I decided to take the powwow society worldview that I come from and present an engaged insight of the contemporary constructed cultural artifact (Demerath, 2002) of the powwow.

My research question is whether the contemporary cultural artifact of powwow can be an ontological approach to cultural sustainability. I approach my work from the position of a single parent mother; I raised my three children without their father. Fortunately, I had the support of my immediate family, albeit amidst typical oppressed family dynamics. Besides my immediate family, the powwow circle family provided support, wisdom, love, bravery, respect, honesty, humility, and truth—the essential values of the Anishinaabe seven grandfather teachings (Hart,