

**“Role models can’t just be on posters”:  
Re/membering Barriers to  
Indigenous Community Engagement**

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**Abstract**

Current Canadian scholarly literature, education policy, and curricular documents encourage the participation of Indigenous community members as a key component of Indigenous Education reform. Guided by sharing circles conducted with Indigenous Elders, families, teachers, and support workers, we present community voices and experiences of Indigenous Education in an urban school board through poetic transcription. Our research suggests that four key barriers will have to be overcome in efforts to improve urban Indigenous Education: unwelcoming schools, professionalization of classroom teaching, colonized classrooms, and unilateral decolonization. Poetic transcription is used in this article to centre the voices of Indigenous participants as well as attempt to decolonize our approach to data dissemination of Indigenous voices as white, Euro-Canadian university-based researchers.

*Keywords:* Indigenous community members, Indigenous education, poetic transcription, decolonizing methodology, whiteness, Eurocentrism.

**Précis**

La littérature savante, les politiques d'éducation et les documents curriculaires canadiens actuels encouragent la participation des membres des communautés

autochtones comme élément-clé de la réforme en matière d'éducation autochtone. À partir des cercles de partage auxquels participaient les aînés, les familles, les enseignants et les agents de soutien, nous présentons, par l'intermédiaire de la transcription poétique, les voix et les expériences d'une communauté autochtone en milieu scolaire urbain. Notre recherche suggère quatre barrières à surmonter dans le but d'améliorer l'expérience scolaire en milieu urbain : écoles non accueillantes, professionnalisation de l'enseignement en salle de classe, salle de classe colonisée et décolonisation unilatérale. L'utilisation de la transcription poétique dans cet article a comme objectif de mettre en valeur les voix des participants de la communauté autochtone et de tenter de décoloniser, à titre de chercheurs universitaires blancs euro-canadiens, notre approche de dissémination des données reliées aux voix autochtones.

**“Role models can’t just be on posters”:**

**Re/membering Barriers to Indigenous Community Engagement**

Recent articulations of Indigenous<sup>1</sup> Education<sup>2,3</sup> within Canadian scholarly literature (Aikenhead and Michell, 2011; Battiste, 1998; Hare, 2011; Kanu, 2011), education policy, (ACDE, 2010; ON-MoE, 2007b) and curricular documents (e.g., BC-MoE, 2005, 2008; ON-MoE, 2007a) call for inclusion of Indigenous community members in schools while non-Indigenous<sup>4</sup> teachers continue to represent the vast majority of teachers in Canada (Kanu, 2005). The accounts of Education by Indigenous students, parents, and scholars continue to reflect negative schooling experiences that include racism as well as the delegitimation and exclusion of Indigenous knowledges in schools (Dion, 2007; Friedel, 1999; Kanu, 2011; Kirkness, 1999, Marker, 2006). This article extends the focus of previous research concerned with Indigenous students (e.g., Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Kanu, 2011) and parents (e.g., Friedel, 1999) by including Indigenous Elders, families, teachers, and cultural support workers’ accounts of urban (provincially-funded) education. Through presentation of poetic transcriptions, we attempt to portray the ways that whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997, 2001) and

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<sup>1</sup> As this article draws from global Indigenous perspectives and is intended for an international audience, we use the term Indigenous throughout. In Canada, Indigenous peoples are often referred to as Aboriginal and include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

<sup>2</sup> The term Indigenous Education refers jointly to the process of educating Indigenous students in schools and integrating Indigenous knowledges, knowledge holders, and pedagogies in schools for the benefit of all students.

<sup>3</sup> Like Rasmussen (2010), we capitalize Education to bring attention to the discourse under which education equates schooling and often denies forms of cultural transmission that are embedded in all cultures. It is a reminder for ourselves and readers that there can be learning without teaching, that learning can happen anywhere, and that the institution of Education is but a recent one (Illich, 1970; Rasmussen, 2010; Zibechi, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Non-Indigenous is reflective of the term most often used in Canadian literature and refers to those peoples who are not Indigenous. It is recognized that this term implies multiple social locations and diversity of peoples. Where possible, particular peoples have been identified by their race and ethnicity (Kanu, 2011).

Eurocentrism (Battiste, 1998, 2005) pervade and shape Indigenous experiences in an urban centre to demonstrate what any Canadian school system will need to contend with in urban Indigenous Education reform. We also explore the use of poetic transcription (Glesne, 1997) as a means of decolonizing academic representations by centering Indigenous community members' stories and making the process by which the stories were recorded and shared more contextual, transparent, and relational (McCall, 2011). Poetic transcription is proposed as an embodied meaning-making practice that is consistent with more holistic Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning which engage the heart, mind, body, and spirit (Archibald, 2008; Cajete, 1999; CCL, 2007; Hare, 2011).

We offer the reader the opportunity to re/member areas of the Education system that need to be targeted for decolonization in working towards educational partnerships with Indigenous communities. Haig-Brown (2005) refers to Indigenous knowledge holders strengthening their knowledge systems through learning from/with/on the land as "re/membering" (p. 90) the knowledge that holds them in relation to the natural and supernatural worlds. In this article, we extend this invitation to re/member to non-Indigenous peoples recognizing that this process is distinct from the process of re/membering for Indigenous peoples as described by Haig-Brown. We invite readers to learn from the voices of Indigenous community members as they reflected upon their processes of coming-to-knowing<sup>5</sup> and shared their vision for the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges in urban schools.

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<sup>5</sup> We use the term coming-to-knowing to reflect that learning is an on-going process without an end point that is embedded within holistic relationships between the natural and supernatural worlds (Ermine, 1998; Little Bear, 2009; Peat, 2002).

## **Re/membering Education: How the Current Education System is Shaped by Colonization, Eurocentrism, and Whiteness**

In this section, we draw on theories of Eurocentrism (Battiste, 1998, 2005) and whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993, 1997, 2001) to facilitate a historical critique of the Education of Indigenous students within Canada. The purpose of this critique is twofold. Firstly, we aim to make connections between two bodies of critical scholarship (Eurocentrism and whiteness) that are not usually linked in discussions of Indigenous Education. The intersection of these theories informed and guided our analysis and interpretation of research data and our generation of poetic transcriptions as representations. Secondly, to undertake the process of re/membering, we must first uncover some of the ways in which Indigenous knowledges have been fractured through Education before we can re/present how such knowledges are being reassembled “out of fragments held by individuals and communities who have had their traditional ways attacked as wrong for generations” (Haig-Brown, 2005, p. 90).

Within Canada, government-funded mission day schools and residential schools<sup>6</sup> were utilized to promote Indigenous students’ “civilization” by imparting the colonizers’ Eurocentric worldview (Meyer & Alvarado, 2010; Kirkness, 1999; Rasmussen, 2002). We utilize the term Eurocentrism to refer to the ideology that “Western European cultures are superior and a standard against which other cultures should be judged” (Lewis & Aikenhead, 2000, p. 53). Following the closing of most residential schools

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<sup>6</sup> By the late 1800s, the day school concept was deemed “unsuccessful” and largely abandoned in favour of residential schools as a means of isolating Indigenous children from their communities and thus their cultures. It was infamously stated that the purpose of residential schools was to “to kill the Indian in the child” (CBC News, 2008).

during the 1960s<sup>7</sup>, Indigenous students attended federally controlled day schools on reserves or were integrated within public schools (Kirkness, 1999). An examination of the conception of these public schools reveals that they too were linked to domination, although their consequences were much less severe than those of residential schools<sup>8</sup>. Early white, male, middle/upper class, Euro-settler curriculum scholars (e.g., Ryerson, Tyler) established a model of Education wrought with various forms of “educational hegemony” (Giroux, 1983) that continue to marginalize Indigenous knowledges and peoples in schools today. For example, schools continue to centre European cultures, languages, histories, and epistemologies claiming universality through objectivity (Battiste, 2005); and operate within an educational framework that ignores the holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledges and the key role Indigenous pedagogies<sup>9</sup> play in knowledge transmission (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 1998, 2005; Hookimaw-Witt, 1998; Kirkness, 1999; Marker, 2004).

Intimately connected to Eurocentrism is whiteness<sup>10</sup> which Frankenberg (1993) defines as a set of three linked dimensions that shape white people’s lives: a) a location of structural advantage, of race privilege; b) a “standpoint” from which white people consider themselves, others, and society overall; and c) a set of cultural practices that

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<sup>7</sup> The last federally run residential school, the Gordon Residential School, was closed in Saskatchewan in 1996 (Assembly of First Nations, n.d.).

<sup>8</sup> The residential school legacy is one of neglect, abuse, and death, as well as cultural, historical, and linguistic erasure. As a whole, the effects of the weakening of Indigenous peoples as a result of 100+ years of residential schools can still be seen today. Cultural conflict; poor self-concept; poverty and underdevelopment; disproportionate levels of incarceration, substance abuse, and sickness and death from preventable illness can be attributed to these early schooling systems.

<sup>9</sup> Indigenous pedagogies are deeply embedded in place and include, but are not limited to, intergenerational, experiential, and ceremonial learning; storywork; and learning in Indigenous languages and through oral history (Apffel-Marglin, 2011; CCL, 2007; Hare, 2011; Marker, 2000).

<sup>10</sup> We do not view whiteness as static or uniform. The material and discursive dimensions of whiteness are historically constructed and internally differentiated (Frankenberg, 1997, 2001). Through internal differentiation, whiteness emerges as a multiplicity of identities that inhabit local custom and national sentiments and, moreover, are spatially and temporally dependent, gendered, class specific, and politically manipulated (Twine & Gallagher, 2008).

usually go unmarked and unnamed. Western European colonial expansion was achieved, at least in part, through asserting dominance of Eurocentric modes of knowing that enabled and rationalized colonization from the standpoint of the West (Blaut, 1993; Memmi, 1965). Frankenberg (1993) refers to this notion as “epistemic violence” (see also “cognitive imperialism”, Battiste, 1998) and argues that it also produced particular ways of conceiving of Indigenous peoples as “other” alongside reformulation of white, European selves. She explains that there continues to be close ties between racist and colonial discourses because “the Western self and the non-Western “other” are co-constructed as discursive products, both of whose “realness” stand in extremely complex relationships to the production of knowledge, and to the material violence to which “epistemic violence” is intimately linked” (p. 17).

Even a brief historical introduction to the Education of Indigenous students in Canada reveals a complex web of systemic injustice that is maintained in schools through various forms of educational hegemony. While various Indigenous Education initiatives intended to restore Indigenous/non-Indigenous relationships and support Indigenous learners have been implemented in schools in recent years, they rarely include a critique of the *existing* and/or *accumulative* relations of power in schools (e.g., BC-MoE, 2005, 2008; Kanu, 2011; ON-MoE, 2007). In the absence of a discussion of how colonization, Eurocentrism, and whiteness shape the current Education system in ways that disadvantage Indigenous peoples, non-Indigenous teachers often blame Indigenous students and their families for the ongoing discrepancies in academic achievement between Indigenous and non-Indigenous<sup>11</sup> students (Carr & Lund, 2009; Kanu, 2005).

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<sup>11</sup> Canadian demographic data does not include information concerning race or ethnicity for those students who comprise the “non-Indigenous” category.

The resulting implicit or explicit position by many non-Indigenous educators is that Indigenous cultures produce Indigenous peoples who “do not value” Education and/or “cannot comprehend” in schools due to the mismatch in worldviews (Donald, 2011b). Similar to Loutzenheiser’s (2006) claim regarding other forms of marginalization within the school system, such a problematic position houses the dilemma “in the child, not in the system, therefore the child needs to be changed, and the system (e.g., normativity and privilege) remains the same” (p. 33). Guided by education policies that often position Indigenous knowledge holders (e.g., Elders, storytellers) as “special guests” rather than foundational to such initiatives, non-Indigenous teachers are tasked to rework the curriculum to make it more relevant to Indigenous students’ cultures. This usually means that Indigenous knowledges are decontextualized and parceled into pieces that teachers can “fit” into Eurocentric disciplines or subjects and curriculum competencies in an attempt to “fix” the problem of Indigenous student “under-achievement” without problematizing teachers’ practices or systemic barriers to integrating Indigenous knowledges in schools.

It is not our intention to critique non-Indigenous teachers’ efforts to integrate Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in schools, as we do consider this to be an important stage of Indigenous Education reform when approached in a respectful manner. Rather, we want to invite readers to join us in re/membering, through the lenses of colonization, Eurocentrism, and whiteness, four barriers that still prevent Indigenous community members from engaging in urban Education: a) unwelcoming schools, b) professionalization of classroom teaching, c) colonized classrooms, and d) unilateral decolonization. Through poetic transcription, we have attempted to create spaces for readers to reflect upon their own positionality within Indigenous—non-Indigenous



relationships through the silences provided by the poems. Within these spaces, we encourage readers to consider their own historical, political, social, and/or cultural relationships to Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and Education.

### Methodology

**Poetic transcription: Re/presenting Indigenous community voices.** Richardson (1992) states, “As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them” (p. 131). As we take this responsibility seriously, we desire to lessen the problematics and pitfalls of conventional research representations that often claim or (quietly) assume to accurately reflect the perspectives of participants. Thus, we turn to an experimental writing form that helps us to approximate speaking *with* our participants and *through* a “third voice” that emerges as the result of our dialogical engagement with the community members’ stories (Freeman, 2006; Glesne, 1997; see also Bohm, 1996; McCall, 2011).

As Tuhiwai Smith (1999) posits, “research is probably one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world’s vocabulary” (p. 5). Within Canada, much research involving Indigenous peoples has been *unethically* conducted *on* rather than *with* participants (Castellano, 2004; Menzies, 2001). There is a large body of scholarship which demonstrates that research done in this manner has often been responsible for the appropriation and commodification of Indigenous knowledges, and furthermore, has often lead to misrepresentations and pathologizing of Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2008; Battiste, Bell, Findlay, Findlay, & Henderson, 2005; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Castellano, 2004; Davis, 2008; Haig-Brown, 2008, 2010; Menzies, 2001, 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2005; Tuck, 2009). There continues to be many Indigenous stories and knowledges that are appropriated and presented as “anonymous”. Paradoxically, such

stories that claim to uphold an Indigenous voice that “speaks for itself” are rarely heard without the intervention of a non-Indigenous “researcher” (Castleden, Morgan, & Neimanis, 2010; McCall, 2011).

Deeply tied to the question of *who* is the voice or representation is the question of *how*. Throughout history, non-Indigenous researchers have collected stories, translating, editing, and organizing them into volumes. Few “traces” of the researcher and the research process remain and most of these accounts or research texts put little responsibility on the reader to make connections between the stories they read and their daily lives. The result, as described by McCall (2011), is one in which the stories and the storytellers become disembodied, decontextualized, ahistorical, and transpersonal (i.e., pan-Indian). McCall (2011) argues that this is how researchers maintain power over the voices used in research texts. We grapple with these issues and recognize how highly problematic and colonial the research encounter has been and can be between non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous community members (and, by extension, Indigenous knowledges).

In searching for a method that would help contextualize and make our research representation more relational in the non-Indigenous researcher and Indigenous community participant conversation (Donald, 2011a; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Oberg, & Leggo, 2008; see also Sameshima, 2008; Springgay, 2008), we seized upon poetic transcription as a possible device to make more explicit and concrete our decolonizing sensibility in research. Poetic transcription is “the creation of poem-like compositions from the words of interviewees” (Glesne, 1997, p. 202). It is an experimental form of data representation often guided by phenomenology and grounded theory that was first employed by Richardson (1992), but later named and procedurally described by Glesne

(1997). While there is not a singular way to create poetic transcriptions, these innovative researchers attempt to give a “portrait” of research findings through the generative space interwoven between text and silence, “between teller and listener, between writer and reader, between signifier and signified” (McCall, 2011, p. 212; see also Donald, 2011a). In bringing attention to this silence, poetry creates space for multiple meanings, the different and embodied ways-of-knowing that readers might bring with them, and a reflective/reflexive stage upon which the voices are placed: poetic transcription brings forth the subtext that is often muffled within research (Eisner, 1997; Glesne, 1997; Leavy, 2009; Mazzei, 2003). As Eisner (1997) states, “poetry transcends the limits of language and evokes what cannot be articulated” (p. 5).

Due to these relational, reflective, and reflexive properties of poetic transcription, we are testing this method of representation as a “good enough” approach (Luttrell, 2000) to work to decolonize the encounter and representation of the Indigenous community members engaging with non-Indigenous researchers. We also seek to involve the reader in this process of decolonization by providing an “ethical space of engagement” which “is not really about the situation of Indigenous peoples in this country, but it is about the character and honor of a nation to have created such conditions of inequity” (Ermine, 2007, p. 200). We suggest that poetic transcription opens a space that calls upon non-Indigenous educators to engage in self-reflexive processes to consider roles, responsibilities, and reconciliation that they can enact within Indigenous Education.

**Re/searching Indigenous Education reform in a Canadian urban school board.** As the Principal Investigator (Lisa Korteweg) and graduate research assistants (Brooke Madden & Marc Higgins), we collected data from community members’ sharing

circles in the process of a longitudinal study into how stakeholder groups (Indigenous students, non-Indigenous students, Elders, Indigenous families, Indigenous cultural support workers, school board administrators, teachers, and principals) could engage to support Indigenous education reform in one Canadian urban school board. Our research team conducted a total of 44 sharing circles and focus groups to respectfully elicit stakeholders' accounts of their experiences of (Indigenous) Education historically and currently in urban schools. Qualitative data generated from the sharing circles and focus groups were recorded by audiotape, videotape, and field notes.

Five sharing circles (1-Indigenous Advisory Committee, 1-Elders, 2-Parents, 1-Indigenous Cultural Support Workers) were conducted with a total of twenty-five Indigenous community members. In this urban school board, there was an existing Indigenous Advisory Committee comprised of Indigenous Elders, parents, and teachers when the research study began. Six members of this committee chose to participate in a sharing circle where they re/membered their experiences of education and perceptions of what is needed in urban Indigenous Education to enhance community participation. An additional sharing circle (Elders) was conducted with Elders who were actively involved in the school board as Indigenous knowledge holders and facilitators. Two sharing circles (Parents) involved nine parents who participate in programs directly tied to a district-wide effort to improve urban Indigenous Education through Adult Education programs (e.g., GED tutoring, parent advocacy, family engagement). The last sharing circle (Indigenous Cultural Support Workers) included six Indigenous staff members who work part-time in various schools for two different school boards in the city. These support workers offer cultural programs during non-instructional periods and after-school to

support Indigenous students with food, physical and cultural activities, and counseling services.

When appropriate and possible, sharing circles were opened with a smudging ceremony. Food and gifts of thanks were offered at each sharing circle as a sign of respect for the participants' generosity with their stories and teachings. Each sharing circle lasted between 2-3 hours, resulting in over 150 pages of transcripts and approximately 13 hours of raw video data. Questions that initiated and guided the sharing circles included community members' own experiences of schooling, their families' and children's experiences, as well as their desires and needs for educational reform through cultural programming, community inclusion, and welcoming environments. Community members also discussed obstacles and barriers that need to be addressed by urban school systems designing and implementing district-wide reform to improve urban Indigenous Education.

In each sharing circle, we discussed the purpose and goals of the research study and communicated that we would honour their words and stories by advocating for improved Indigenous Education. Lisa facilitated all sharing circles involving Indigenous community members. Brooke and/or Marc were present at all sharing circles and transcribed and analyzed all transcripts generated from discussions with Indigenous community members, coding data in ATLAS.ti. (qualitative data analysis software). Lisa also sought guidance for each stage of the research from the Indigenous Advisory Council as well as presented the study's findings first to this Council.

**Creating poetic transcriptions: Re/membering barriers to Indigenous community engagement.** Acknowledging our responsibility to make the ways in which

these stories are re/membered, relational, contextual, transparent, and decolonizing (McCall, 2011), in this section we describe how the poems were created. Our work began by re/researching a subset of data retrieved from an ATLAS.ti query for textual passages coded as “Barriers” (i.e., barriers to engagement in Indigenous Education) across transcripts from five distinct sharing circles (1-Indigenous Advisory committee, 1-Elders, 2-Parents, 1-Indigenous Cultural Support Workers). Sorting in this manner produced a list of data “chunks” that momentarily collapsed data in a manner that revealed Indigenous community members as a collective stakeholder group, illuminated the comments made by sharing circle participants while downplaying the research context (e.g., opening sharing circle questions), and appeared both dialogic and poetic. Theories of whiteness and Eurocentrism provided intersectional frames that guided the organization of transcript “chunks” into four subthemes: unwelcoming schools, professionalization of classroom teaching, colonized classrooms, and unilateral decolonization. These subthemes are presented as the four continuing barriers that dissuade and prevent Indigenous community members from recognizing or engaging in urban (Indigenous) Education.

Once barriers were determined and data “chunks” organized accordingly, we began (dis)assembling<sup>12</sup> selected key words and phrases from select data “chunks” that a) illustrated the barrier being explored; b) highlighted Indigenous knowledges, knowledge holders, and pedagogies; c) juxtaposed additional “chunks” in a complimentary manner (e.g., cadence, supporting or supplementary example); and d) contributed to a wide range of community voices (i.e. voices of Elders, family members, teachers, and cultural support workers). While recognizing that there is no particular way to do poetic

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed exemplar of one approach to this process, see Glesne (1997).

transcription, we drew on several of Glesne's (1997) procedures and protocols as we pieced participants' words together. First, the words within the poetic transcriptions are those of the participants, not the researchers. Phrases pulled from data "chunks" have been left intact in order to reflect, respect, and honour the participants' speaking rhythms, patterns, and word choices. Second, unlike Glesne (1997), the phrases that compose the poetic transcriptions are not arranged in the same chronological order that they appear within transcripts; rather, they are drawn from five distinct sharing circles involving multiple community participants. This reflects the fluidity of dialogue as it occurs within sharing circles (Graveline, 1998) as well as the notion that experience is multiple and accumulative across historical periods (e.g., my experience, my grand-mother's, my little brother's, my child's ...). It also indicates that time, as many Indigenous philosophers articulate, is non-linear (e.g., circular, interconnecting) and in flux (Atleo, 2004; Cajete, 1994, 1999; see also Anderson, 2011; Peat, 2002). Like Freeman (2006), the poems found herein represent an assemblage of multiple participant voices speaking as one, even if the voices were not originally speaking to one another (McCall, 2011).

Before each poetic transcription, we give readers a glimpse into the research context in order to provide a background or a "frame" for the reader to place around the "portrait" that is the poem so that they are situated to engage in their own meaning-making practices (Freeman, 2006; Glesne, 1997). We do recognize some limitations of poetic transcription as this method removes the voices within the poems from the multiple contextual layers from which they emerged (e.g., speaker, conversation, spatial and temporal locations). This aspect of the method is not consistent with an Indigenous oral tradition that does not detach what was said from speaker, context, and audience. Poetic transcription also risks obscuring the relations of power that shape the experiences

of Indigenous community members in an urban school board, including the power dynamics embedded and operating within the various stages of our study.

We do not explicitly analyze the situated poetic transcriptions because it is customary in this methodology to allow the poems to speak *as* the research findings. It is important to reiterate that we do not consider the voice of the poem singular, but rather a “third voice” or a “first person plural” (McCall, 2011) that reflects our dialogic engagement with the participants’ voices and stories. We share these poetic re/presentations not as clear, stable, authentic voices, but rather a re/telling and re/membering of stories as we heard them, lived them, and were gifted with them. We view findings of this type as a form of collaboration that “can be a creative space in which new forms of agency and voice may arise” (McCall, 2011, p. 212) through asking the reader to utilize the poetic transcriptions to re/member their own relationships to Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and Education.

### **Situated Poetic Transcriptions**

**Unwelcoming schools.** At the time of the study, the urban school board had a variety of initiatives in place to support urban Indigenous Education including: after-school cultural programs (e.g., drumming group), breakfast club, adult education, and creating environments which sought to make school spaces more welcoming to Indigenous students and parents through friendly staff, bulletin boards, and cultural signage. Despite these efforts, Indigenous community members reported experiences of racism in schools, accumulated through their own school lives and their family members’, including their own children and grand-children. They shared multiple examples of ignorance by teachers who lacked knowledge about how to respectfully



integrate Indigenous cultures, knowledges, and traditions/protocols in schools and curriculum. Furthermore, some Indigenous community members shared stories of how they had historically experienced schools as a place of damage, exploitation, and cultural negation.

**It just so happens, our country has a lot of Native Canadians in it**

Welcoming has different definitions for different people right?

The administrator told me, “No, we’re allergic to that.”

Then with respect, I’ll do my own smudging at home.

Remember, these people have asked me to open the meeting.

There was a time when we would get in trouble for drumming.

“Can you [Elder] stop fooling around? We’re not going to pay you to fool around.”

That haircut incident a year ago – that should have never happened.

Another time we were told, “The school can’t fund self-esteem.”

Welcoming has different definitions for different people right?

Some schools have the worst space, but it’s a space that’s loved.

Other schools are doing it because it looks good on paper.

When I go into my daughter’s school, it’s similar to going into any business.

The parents I see have a mistrust of the school.

They trust me and talk to me because I’m dark like them.

My husband won’t even go to parent-teacher nights.

And it seems they’re still nervous – the parents are still nervous.

Welcoming has different definitions for different people right?

Learning a little bit about their own [non-Indigenous ancestral] culture would maybe help the pain.

Maybe a white girl would become friends with an Indian?

I could read to students. I've seen Elders go there and read.

But for somebody like me to go in there – I haven't seen that.

The teacher left the room as I was doing a presentation on respect.

If I don't go in there [school] and talk, nobody's going to talk to me.

Teachers pay attention to who's eating at that breakfast program.

*Professionalization of classroom teaching.* Many Canadian Ministries of Education are revising curricular documents to integrate Indigenous perspectives across a variety of disciplines over all grades (e.g., BC-MoE, 2005, 2008; Government of Saskatchewan, 2007, ON-MoE, 2007a, 2007b). Accordingly, in the school board where this study took place, K-12 teachers were encouraged to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their lessons and several new secondary courses in Indigenous language and history were being offered. During sharing circles, many Indigenous community members expressed concerns that non-Indigenous teachers were responsible for teaching Indigenous content integrated into provincial curricular documents. Some commented that despite possessing teaching credentials, non-Indigenous teachers often do not possess the “lived” or inherited knowledge, and/or relationships with, and permission from, Indigenous communities to carry out this task in a responsible and respectful manner. Some Indigenous community members expressed that they did, indeed, have this ability

and community endorsement. They explained that they thought this skill-set involved the capacity to connect Indigenous students' cultural identities to their school lives through teachings based in Indigenous systems of knowledge that are embedded in place, language, and culture as well as supported by the community and engaged through protocols. They questioned whether such skills could be developed through professional certification or accreditation from a College of Teachers.

**It's not a criticism, it's a fact**

The thing is, that's how we lived before European contact.

The old tradition, harmony instead of just extracting things,

Is something that has worked for 10 000 years.

The teachings, our connection to Mother Earth

Are a way of life, they're instinctual.

The one thing about our way, it's a lifetime of learning.

Hearing the teachings and walking the path;

To be learned at the times we're ready to hear them.

We had to come back because we got into trouble with alcohol.

There was abuse of every kind you could think of.

I walk around and I let it find me; it calls to me and then I find it.

I take that tobacco and then I hold that tree or that plant and I pray.

I close my eyes and I see it, wait for it to come to me, to tell me.

When I make teas, the last thing I do is pray to the Great Spirit and Mother Earth;

That those medicines will be used in a way to help people.

Living knowledge needs to be brought into the schools.

Native people are willing.

If they have no credentials – they are called a “special guest”.

A teaching degree in Native language – there’s no access.

What an opportunity missed.

Posters are just on the wall.

My son would be learning his Native language right now instead of French.

The teachers think they know what’s best.

But they have missed the point.

How do you write down spiritual connection to Great Spirit?

Teachers can’t understand the connections the spirits have allowed me to make.

They say, “I never get a response like that from them [students].”

I have to explain, “It’s not about me, it’s about the teachings.”

They didn’t have the opportunity to walk with my Elders and hear the lessons as I have.

It’s not a criticism, it’s a fact.

**Colonized classrooms.** Some Indigenous Elders and urban support workers spoke of the challenges of “fitting” Indigenous knowledges into the larger education framework that positions teachers as “experts” responsible for imparting knowledge onto students

and in which assessment plays a significant role. They explained that Indigenous knowledges are holistic, involving interactions among the intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical realms of an individual, family, community, and nation (Archibald, 2008) and emphasized that the transmission of Indigenous knowledges is dependent on Indigenous pedagogies. Furthermore, some Indigenous community members spoke of Eurocentric structural constraints within schools that limit their ability to share Indigenous knowledges. These included examples such as knowledge classification systems that ignore a holistic paradigm (e.g., subjects, modules, and lessons), temporal and spatial parameters of the classroom day (e.g., fixed learning intervals, desks positioned in rows, text-based learning), and the “types” of Indigenous knowledges sought for inclusion in schools (e.g., Indigenous dance and other art forms that community members perceived as non-threatening to dominant discourses). Indigenous community members were also troubled that, in most cases, Canadian history is still represented from the perspective of the colonizers while Indigenous perspectives and history are regulated and contained to specific (often tokenized) units or single treatments rather than integrated throughout the curriculum.

**We were used to walking in snowshoes, and now they got roller skates and scooters**

I would say to my family, “What you’re saying is not true”.

This isn’t what they taught me in schools.

It destroyed lots of beliefs and the way of life.

I knew nothing about my culture.

What’s in the books as Native history is not who we are.

I don't know how to put it into words.

We're now being invited to participate in a culture [Indigenous Education] that was brought to us;

A weird circle that's finally kind of rolling around.

They want to have partnerships but only to a certain degree.

What we do is equal to their curriculum.

A Pow Wow is around \$6000.00 to present what we do.

That's the only way to explain to the principal the value of what they're getting.

There's a lot of control issues.

They [staff] just don't trust us.

We're accused of stealing the school board's food.

Dodgeballs get names written on them and are hidden.

The very first thing you do is get them [students] out of the regimented rows.

You bring them back to the way the Elders taught;

"I may be bigger than you but I'm no better, I'm no worse".

Accept everybody for the path that they're on and where they're at.

Put your pen down and your paper. Put it away.

Nature has a timetable; you have to respect that time and that rhythm.

Take our children by the hands to the water and say, "Touch it."

It's all connected and we knew it. We couldn't define it.

We'll work with your curriculum.

A lot of teachers think we're just social studies or history.

The significance of the teachings is enormous.

What we do is equal to their curriculum.

They have it in their minds what they want done.

We just don't fit into it.

They don't get to smudge anymore;

There's no language instruction, cultural outings, a feast.

We'll work with your curriculum.

What we do is equal to your curriculum.

*Unilateral decolonization.* Indigenous community members shared examples of how they are decolonizing (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999) by healing their peoples through ceremony, storywork, and revitalizing their languages, cultures, and knowledges in the urban community and in the schools. Comments indicate that community members were questioning the political will and commitment of non-Indigenous school staff to develop relationships with Indigenous peoples or even hear stories that might expose non-Indigenous educators' own colonial legacies and resultant privilege. Some Indigenous community members commented on what they perceived as an attitude of non-implication or a disavowal of responsibility from some non-Indigenous school staff towards Indigenous Education in general (see Dion, 2007). Sharing circle comments suggest Indigenous community members felt it was important for non-Indigenous teachers and administrators to confront and acknowledge their own inherited Eurocentrism and complicity in racism that continue to pervade schools today.

Indigenous community members stated that it was necessary for non-Indigenous educators in urban school boards to do this work before they could engage reciprocally and respectfully in the role of aspiring allies.

**If you hear the truth, you've just gotta change**

I wear your clothes and I speak your language.

I have a job and I pay taxes just like you.

I get 'em [my children] cable, I get 'em online, I get 'em computers.

Yay! There's a Wal-Mart here!

It's either this or go back to your reserve and become a statistic.

If you want kids to know who they are, we need programs.

The Canadian government has done a great job,

Of not letting the people know about anything they did to us.

Teachers are really lacking that knowledge.

It's really heavy when people start to learn the real history.

Take that and run with it; try to help us.

Or run away and just deny it; say "It happened a long time ago".

I fight for our people big time. Cause who's going to fight for us?

Parents need someone to go with; we started the Advocacy Program.

I can't translate but that's part of the service, that's part of the idea.

A familiar face, providing childcare, a luncheon, a dinner.

A parent room is a great idea, it would be nice to build on that.



We do a lot of things that don't get noticed.

You can't go around talking about respect, if you're still disrespectful.

They're the ones that have to do what I had to do to get my values back.

How many years have we told that principal the etiquette of Pow Wow?

By now you should know how to treat people when they come to your school.

It just shows the ignorance.

They'll get back what they put in.

They owe it to us; never mind "Should we have it or not?"

Indian Residential Schools, The Indian Act, The 60s scoop.

For that part of history alone; they owe it to us.

It's a treaty right. It's a responsibility.

The federal government needs to own up to those issues too.

Self-identification is ridiculous as a means of acquiring funding into the system.

If you hear the truth, you've just gotta change.

Believe in our program, don't take it over.

An Aboriginal organization by and for the community;

Say, "You guys are doing it right; here's some money to expand".

It's about leadership. The principal sets the tone.

Cause who's going to fight for us?

### Concluding Remarks: a Call to Re/member

In this article, we provide theoretical (i.e., colonization, whiteness, and Eurocentrism), methodological (i.e., poetic transcription), and contextual (i.e., larger research contexts) frameworks to set the stage for readerly and relational engagement with the four barriers (i.e., unwelcoming schools, professionalization of classroom teaching, colonized classrooms, unilateral decolonization) re/membered by Indigenous community members. In offering an invitation for readers to engage *with* the perceptions, experiences, and stories of urban Education, we work towards enhancing participation and engagement in urban school reform. In attempting to both honour the stories entrusted to us by Indigenous community members, as well as work within and against the possibilities and problematics inherent within research representations, which are uniquely compounded by complex, historical Indigenous—non-Indigenous relations, we actively searched for a creative way to re/search, re/present, and re/member. Poetic transcription, a method that resonates with many of the tenets of Indigenous—non-Indigenous collaborative authorship (McCall, 2011), is representative of our desire as white researchers to work *with* the stories of the community members rather than *on* their voices (see McCall, 2011; Menzies, 2001). The poems weave multiple experiences and stories across four barriers, becoming a “third voice” which differentially comes into being through the assemblage of the Indigenous community members’ stories, the Euro-Canadian researchers’ responses to these stories, and y/our/selves as readers (Glesne, 1997; Whitney, 2004). Through weaving Indigenous community members’ visions for engagement within Indigenous Education as well as providing theoretical, methodological, and contextual frames, our intention is to invite the reader to reflexively/reflectively engage in rich meaning-making that is embodied and w/holistic in

order to re/member their own engagement and relationships to and within Indigenous Education.

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