Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy
Revue canadienne en administration et politique de l'éducation

CJEAP Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy

School Leadership for Decolonization and Indigenization

Joshua Hill

Citer cet article

Résumé de l'article

Decolonization and Indigenization of k-12 schooling is pressing and important and must move forward within the significant challenges and unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper I share what I learned in partnership with school leaders about leading Indigenization in a global pandemic. Through findings from a design-based study I present the needs and challenges of school leaders and chronicle what school leadership looked like towards decolonization and Indigenization. I conclude with questions intended to inspire critical reflection and open up possibilities for educators, policy makers, and educational researchers leading this work in the ongoing pandemic and beyond.

School Leadership for Decolonization and Indigenization

Joshua Hill
Mount Royal University

Abstract

Decolonization and Indigenization of k-12 schooling is pressing and important and must move forward within the significant challenges and unique circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this paper I share what I learned in partnership with school leaders about leading Indigenization in a global pandemic. Through findings from a design-based study I present the needs and challenges of school leaders and chronicle what school leadership looked like towards decolonization and Indigenization. I conclude with questions intended to inspire critical reflection and open up possibilities for educators, policy makers, and educational researchers leading this work in the ongoing pandemic and beyond.

Keywords: Indigenous, decolonization of education, leadership, school change

Introduction

The tragic news of the discovery of mass graves at the former sites of Indian Residential Schools has brought urgency for schools to respond in significant ways to the calls on education to support reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). At this very same time however schools have been thrown into "undeniable chaos" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2020, p. 334) as COVID-19 has had a massive impact on learning, teaching, and leadership in schools (Azorín, 2020). Yet, justice for Indigenous Peoples in Canada cannot wait any longer; school leaders cannot let the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls to action end up as another in the long list of unfulfilled calls for change (National Indian Assembly of First Nations, 1972; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011; United Nations, 2007). Through the context of the global pandemic, I partnered with a school district in a multi-year design-based research (DBR) study to advance the practices of decolonization and Indigenization through school leadership. I collected data in the forms of surveys, interviews, observations of leadership, and artefacts of leadership. Findings were developed to inform the ongoing design of professional learning and system supports for school leaders in a medium sized school district located in Treaty 7 territory.

I present the findings here for practitioners, researchers, and policy makers interested in school leadership for decolonization and Indigenization. I proceed as follows: first I situate this study in context; I then present the theoretical frame of decolonization and Indigenization; next, I detail how I sought to decolonize design-based research and chronicle the methods employed; following this, I present the findings in two themes, (1) needs and challenges of school leaders, and (2) school leadership for decolonization and Indigenization. I conclude with critical questions to open up possibilities for school leaders, system leaders, policy makers, and educational researchers.

Situating this Research

Situating this Research on the Land

This research took place on the traditional Lands of the Niitsitapi (Blackfoot) the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuu T'ina, and the Iyarhe (Stoney) Nakoda First Nations. As I conduct research on this Land, I recognize my responsibility to continuously work to repair harms and redress injustices perpetrated upon Indigenous communities presently and historically, and to advance new relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. In this project and paper, I have attempted to live up to these responsibilities.

Situating this Research in Context

This research took place in partnership with a medium sized school district made up of urban and rural schools. The research activities presented in this paper represent the first year of a multi-year project and took place from August 2020-June 2021. To situate the research in the forthcoming sections I present: the COVID-19 context; the history of Indigenization work in the district; the impetus for this research partnership; the professional learning activities that informed the collection of data; and my role as researcher.

COVID-19 Context

During the time frame of this research the global COVID-19 pandemic had significant operational impacts on the school district including: the formation of optional fully-online learning for K-12 students; changing government mandated protocols for schools including physical distancing requirements, cleaning requirements, masking requirements, and contacting tracing and isolation requirements; and system wide government mandated transitions back and forth from face to face to fully-online learning. More difficult to briefly chronicle is the "supernova" like impact of the pandemic on learning, teaching, and leadership throughout the system (Azorín, 2020).

Background of Indigenization Work in the School District

Over the past 15 years, schools in the district, most notably schools with larger Indigenous student populations and located in closer proximity to First Nations, had engaged in Indigenization work. At the system level, significant policy drivers of this work included the 2005 implementation of a new Alberta Social Studies Curriculum that included "Aboriginal Perspectives and experiences" and the 2018 implementation of a new Alberta Teaching Quality Standard which included the teaching competency "applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students" (Alberta Education, 2005, p. 4, 2018, p. 6). At the school district level, a learning specialist position of "First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Specialist" had existed over the previous twelve years. This role involved coordinating system level Indigenization learning opportunities and building relationships with Indigenous partners. For budgetary reasons, this role was discontinued at the end the school year that preceded the start of this project. Notably, over the previous two school years the district had worked to develop a Land Acknowledgement through consultation and guidance from Indigenous Elders, neighbouring First Nations, and school communities.

Situating the Researcher

I am a Métis Scholar and my ancestors trace back to the historic Red River Métis community as well as to European settler communities. I live and work in Treaty 7 territory and am a member of the Métis Nation of Alberta. In this project I held the role of research partner. I have a substantial history in the school district including having been a student, parent, teacher, instructional leader, system leader, and research partner. I recognize the relationships and history I have in the district influenced the access I was granted in this project, the ways in which I engaged as a research partner, and my interpretation of the data. In framing my role as a research partner in this project I defined clear goals of the research and "lines of relating" (Smith, 2012, p. 137) to define the scope of my role. I also endeavoured to take up my role of "insider" researcher with reflexivity (Smith, 2012, p. 137). Throughout the project I received guidance

from an Indigenous Elder to help me reflect on doing this work in a good way. I view my relationships in this research and my commitments and responsibilities to the school district over time as central to what makes this research ethical (Chambers, 2004).

Development and Implementation of the Research Partnership

School district leaders contacted me, an assistant professor at a local University, to support them to lead a system wide school leadership focus on Indigenization. A key component of this initiative was a professional learning series for all principals and assistant principals in the system with the aim of building capacity for school leaders to share the new district Land Acknowledgement in school communities and to use it as a learning opportunity to advance Indigenization. At the outset of the partnership we developed a shared goal of using DBR as a vehicle to advance school leadership for Indigenization in the school district through the ongoing collection of data and iteration of district level professional learning, supports, and polity. The research question that framed this inquiry was: how might school district leaders work to create a welcoming, inclusive, and culturally competent learning community that respects, includes, and promotes Indigenous ways of knowing, teaching, and learning?

An Indigenous Inclusion Council (IIC) was formed to guide the project. The IIC was made up of district leaders, school-based leaders, a school based "Indigenous Connector", and me as research partner. The IIC met monthly throughout the school year. I consulted with the IIC to design data collection opportunities to support their decision-making. The findings shared in this paper were developed for use by the IIC to inform professional learning design decisions and the allocation of school district supports.

Professional Learning Activities

The survey data that is presented in this paper was collected in response to two professional learning sessions organized by the IIC and put on for all school-based leaders (Principals and Assistant Principals) as a part of the system-wide leadership meetings. The focus of these professional learning sessions was on building an understanding of colonization, systemic racism, decolonization, and Indigenization. Presenters at these sessions included an Indigenizing education scholar, a systemic racism scholar, an Indigenous Elder, and an Indigenous success coach from another school division. An optional multi-date land based professional learning session with an Indigenous Elder was also offered for school leaders during the time frame of this study.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework of decolonization and Indigenization informed the framing of this project, the professional learning activities offered to system leaders, the design of the survey and interview questions, and the interpretation of the data.

Decolonization

As educators seek to include Indigenous perspectives in classrooms, schools, and school districts, they must seek to take into account the historical context. Battiste (2013) pointedly articulated: "for more than a century, Indigenous students have been part of a forced assimiliation plan- their heritage and knowledge rejected and suppressed, and ignored by the education system" (p. 23). Given what has taken place in the past and recognizing the legacy of damage, educators must consider how to create an ethical space to engage with Indigenous Knowledges and People (Ermine, 2017).

Connected to this, the dominance of Eurocentric Knowledge in education has contributed to a reality in which teachers, principals, system leaders, parents, and even the very structures, pedagogies, and curriculum in the education system have been steeped in "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste, 2013, p. 26). Decolonization involves unearthing and untangling complex webs of oppression created by colonization (Louie et al., 2017). School systems need to interrogate the "existing cultural interpretative monopoly of Eurocentric Knowledges, assumptions, and methodologies" (Battiste, 2013, p. 125). Without this decolonizing work, attempts at including Indigenous knowledges can become manifestations of "tokensim, voyeruism, and cultural toursim" (Styres, 2019, p. 40).

Part of this work is disrupting the taken for granted neutrality of Eurocentric Knowledges and draw-

ing awareness to the ways in which they are interrconnected with cultural attitudes, values, and presumptions (Battiste, 2013). Until this disruption occurs, difference can only be understood as abbreation from the norm (Battiste, 2013). Decolonization involves "breaking with the ways in which the Indigenous human condition is defined and shaped by domiant Euro-American cutlures" (Dei et al., 2000, p. 113). Decolonization needs to occur at the school district level and address policy, school design, and leadership (Louie, 2021). This work must also include supporting teachers and leaders to engage in an ongoing journey of decolonizing their own positionalities, biases, behavours, and assumptions (Styres, 2019).

Indigenization

From a place of critical awareness, educators can begin to tranform assimilative frameworks and move towards validating and including Indigenous knowledges and epistomoliges alongside Eurocentric knolwedges (Battiste, 2013). Indigenization is a process of "(re)membering, (re)cognizing and (re)centering Indigenous thought in euctation" (Styres, 2019, p. 57). Educators must resist conceptualizations of infusing or incorporating Indigenous knowledge into education as these metaphors serve to reinforce colonial relations of power (Donald, 2012). Rather, Indigenization of education might better be thought of as a "braiding" of Indigenous Knowledges with Eurocentric Knowledges (Kimmerer, 2013). Ermine (2007) envisioned a trans-systemic space "in between worldviews", that reaches beyond two distinct systems of knowledge (p. 193). Indigenization is not about replacing dominant Eurocentric thought, but rather positioning Indigeneous and Eurocentric Knowledge systems in "mutulally egalitariaton and sovereign" relationship (Styres, 2019, p. 40).

Importantly, Indigenizing education must be done in relationship with Indigenous Peoples and communities. Styres (2019) envisioned educational insitutions in allyship, that is becoming "responsive to and responsible for moving the self-determining interests of Indigenous communities forward" (p. 59). At the root, including Indigeneous perspectives in education is about asserting the presence and humanity of Indigenous Peoples (Battiste, 2013).

Research Approach

Design-based Research as Decolonized Methodology

I employed DBR because of its potential to advance the tenets of decolonization within educational research. Specifically because of its focus on engaging in learning and knowledge creation in a local context in parntership with practioneers (Barab, 2014). In this section I seek to identify ways in which DBR features points of inclusion with Indigenous research frameworks and position DBR as being "less oppressive" on a continuum of methodologies (Kovach, 2009, p. 152). It is important to be clear that DBR is not an Indigenous methodology. As Smith (2012) suggested, as an Indigenous scholar I am seeking to find ways to live simultaneously within Eurocentric systems while exploring alternative theories and ways of conducting research.

One important tenet of decolonizing methodologies is engaging in research that serves local communities (Smith, 2012). Through a DBR approach I was able to work with school system leaders to identify a project of benefit to the school district. Another key element of decolonized research is situating knowledge in place, culture, and relationship (Kovach, 2009). This research was situated in partnership and place and in this paper I strive to ground the knowledge shared in context. Furthermore, in my role as researcher I was directly involved in the creation of knowledge alongside school leaders and school communities whom which I have a longstanding relationship with and feel accountable to (Hill, 2020). As an insider researcher, I endeavoured to wrestle with matters of axiology through reflexivity and ongoing consideration (Smith, 2012). The flexbility of DBR allowed for the methods to emerge in response to the local context, and allowed me to consider each design decision in the research in relation to local needs and in consultation with the IIC. In the next section I outline the research activities that unfolded in this study.

Research Activities

A primary purpose of the data collected throughout this first year of the study was to understand the

needs and experiences of school leaders to inform the ongoing design of professional learning and school district supports. Data was collected from school leaders through surveys, interviews, observations of leadership, and artefacts of leadership.

Following two separate system wide school leader professional learning sessions a survey was offered to 125 principals and assistant principals. The first survey conducted in January 2020 had 44 participants respond and the second survey conducted in March 2020 had 23 respondents. The quantitative and qualitative questions were designed based on the theoretical framework and sought to understand the participants learning needs in follow up to the professional learning sessions. The 5-point ordinal Likert scale of the instrument was drawn from the Design-Based Professional Learning survey (Chu et al., 2020). A web based survey platform with built in informed consent was used to administer the surveys. Qualtrics survey software was used to conduct a descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data.

School leaders were recruited through an email recruitment letter. All participants who provided consent were included in this phase of the study. Six interviews, four observation of leadership, and three artefacts of leadership were collected. In response to COVID-19 restrictions, the interviews and observations of leadership took place via video conferencing. The qualitative survey data, interviews, observations of leadership, and artefacts of school leadership were analyzed using iterative cycles of coding (Miles et al., 2014). The first review of data yielded codes that were then collapsed into categories, refined, and used for a second round of coding. Following the second round of coding, findings were developed, organized by two key themes, and representing insights from across all forms of data. A final cycle of iteration involved using the findings as categories. This cycle resulted in further collapsing of codes, refinement of the findings, and curation of statistics and quotations to support the presentations of findings. In the upcoming section I present these findings and their supporting data.

Findings

I have organized the findings into two themes, in the first theme I seek to represent the professional learning and support needs of school based leaders towards leading decolonization and Indigenization. I share what school leaders in this study felt was important, the challenges they faced, their perspectives on professional learning, and their expectations for system support and leadership. In the second theme I present the ways in which school leadership towards decolonization and Indigenization was enacted in six schools. The findings in this theme chronicle how school-based leaders supported this work through leadership practices, designing professional learning, school design decisions, their work with students, and engagement with parents.

Theme One: Needs and Challenges of School Leaders

In this theme I aim to illustrate the needs and challenges school-based leaders in this study experienced in leading decolonization and Indigenization.

School Leaders Believe that Decolonization and Indigenization is of a High Level of Importance for their Schools. In combined data collected from two post professional learning surveys, 64 of 67 school-based leaders indicated a strong or very strong level of agreement in the importance of decolonization and Indigenizaiton in their schools. Figures 1 and 2 present the data. Of additional note, the level of agreement increased over the course of the professional learning series with all respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing in the second survey.
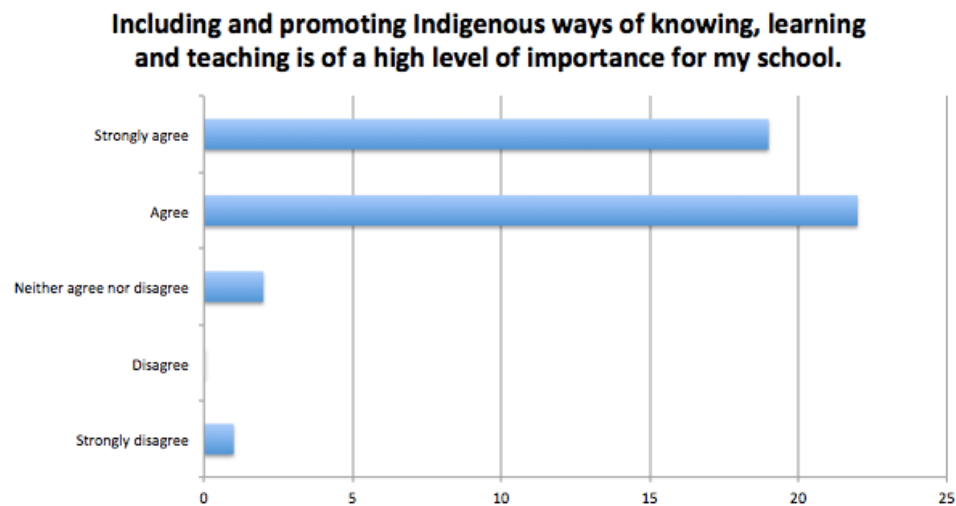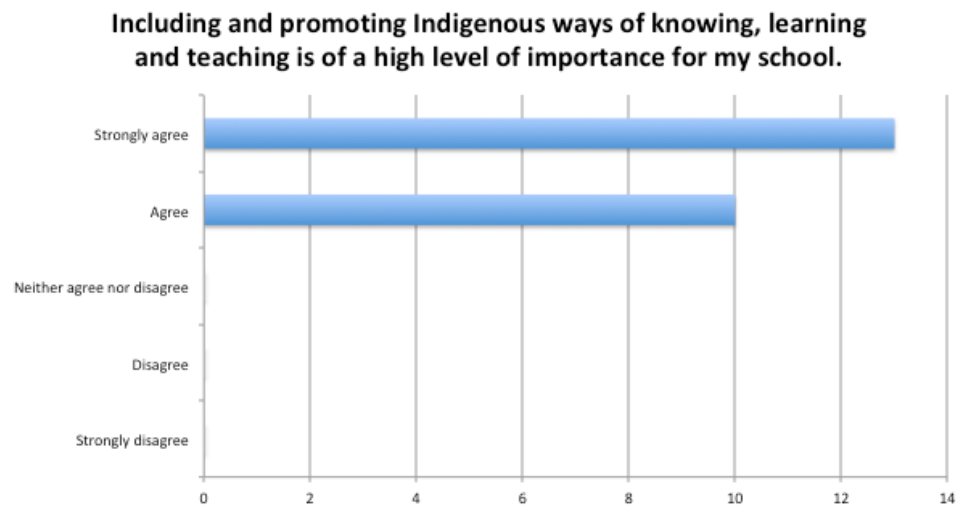
Figure 1
Survey 1 Responses to Importance

Including and promoting Indigenous ways of knowing, learning and teaching is of a high level of importance for my school.

Figure 2
Survey 2 Responses to Importance

Including and promoting Indigenous ways of knowing, learning and teaching is of a high level of importance for my school.

The interview data provided some context as to why school leaders perceived this work as important. All six of the leaders interviewed pointed to professional learning they had engaged in when reflecting on the importance of this work. This included both reference to the school district professional learning series at the core of this study and other professional learning including graduate studies. Four of the six leaders interviewed spoke about personal relationships and experiences with Indigenous People when asked about the imperative that they feel; they shared experiences of being Indigenous, experiences of teaching in Indigenous communities, and experiences of mentorship from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Holders. Lastly, many of the participants spoke to a peronal commitment they held towards being anti-racist and to support justice and inclusion for Indigenous Peoples. One leader framed it this way: "we have such a big job as educators and society. It's huge".

School Leaders Need Professional Learning Focused on Colonization, Decolonization, and Decolonization in Education. In the surveys, school leaders expressed high levels of agreement that they need more professional learning focused on understanding colonization and decolonization (43 of 67 respondents agreed or strongly agreed) and that they need more professional learning focused on decolonizing education (51 of 67 respondents agreed or strongly agreed). These results came following professional learning focused on these topics.

The qualitative survey data and interviews provided greater context for this need: "The decolonization pieces in my leadership practice is what really needs to come first" (School Leader). Several leaders explained that for Indigenization to be successful, it needs to be paired with decolonization in order to understand "how we look at things from our Western lens and can see the world as correct through that lens only" and how this dominance of Eurocentric knowledge "is affecting decreasing opportunity for students and making them feel that they don't belong or they're not accepted or that their multiple worldviews aren't taken into consideration in their learning".

Leaders described that this work can be "uncomfortable," "heavy", and "overwhelming". One leader urged "don't let us off the hook", another noted that we have to "get past tears and feeling bad" to get to an understanding of the extent of the problem and the work that needs to be done to dismantle it.

School Leaders Need Support and Opportunities to Build Relationships with and Learn from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Leaders expressed a high level of agreement that they need more professional learning focused on Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching (58 of 67 respondents in the combined surveys agreed or strongly agreed). Analysis of the qualitative data from both the surveys and interviews provided more information about this need. Most frequently referenced was the importance of building relationships with and learning from Indigenous Elders. Leaders spoke of the need to support building these relationships including knowing who to contact, knowing protocols to be followed, and having budget and cash payroll proccesses to support honoariums for Elders. Leaders articulated the importance of developing and sustaining long term mentoring relationships with Elders that involve providing guidance in ways of knowing, learning, and teaching for the school community including students, teachers, parents, and themselves. In the COVID-19 restriction context in most cases schools were unable to welcome Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers into the school in a face to face format. In response to this reality, Leaders arranged opportunities for Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to connect with students and teachers via video confering and outdoors.

School Leaders Need Professional Learning on Leading Decolonization and Indigenization in Schools. In both surveys, and for both decolonization and Indigenization, leaders expressed high levels of aggreement in the need for professional learning focused on leading their school communities (see figures 3 and 4). This points to the desire for leaders to apply their learning and move it forward into their school.

Figure 3
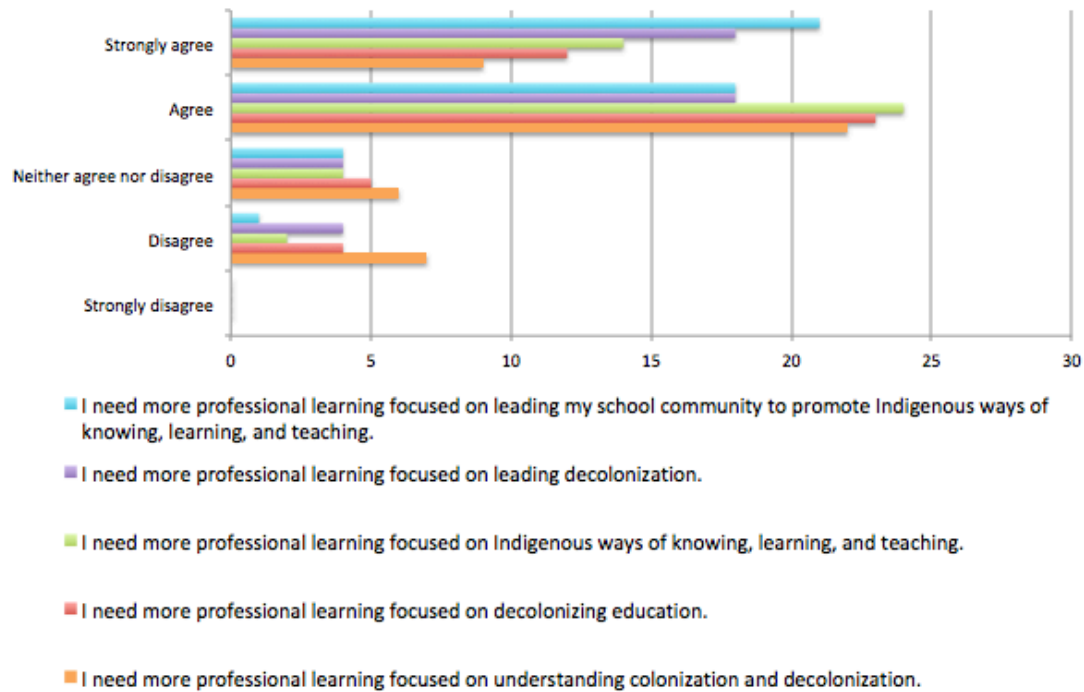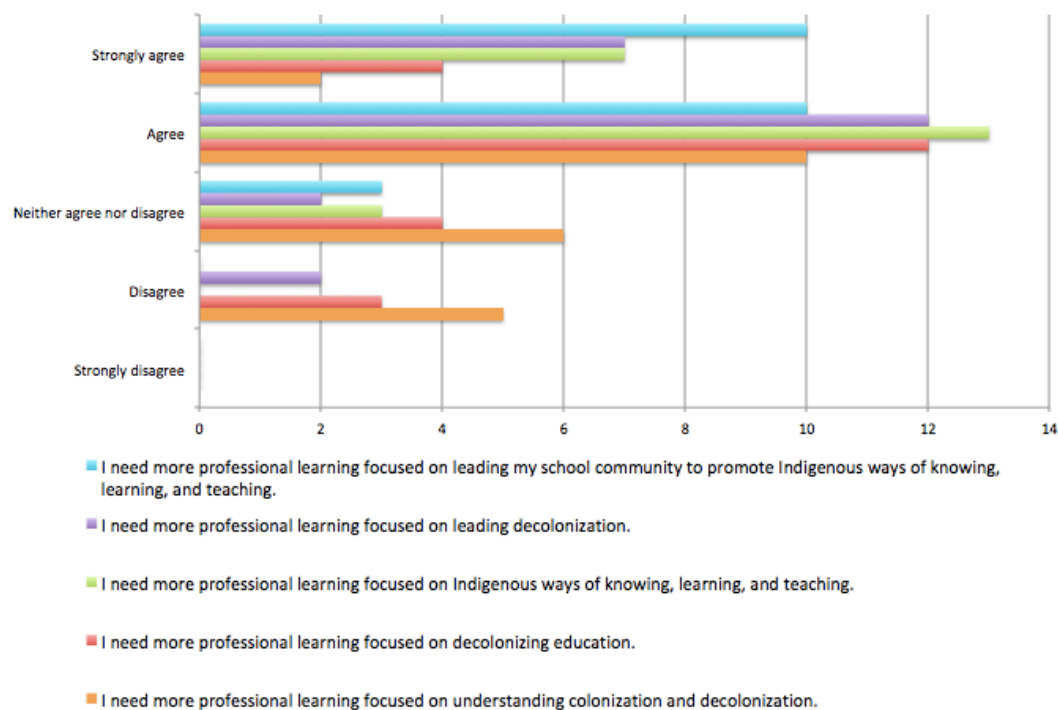*Survey 1 Responses to Professional Learning Needs*

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on leading my school community to promote Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on leading decolonization.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on decolonizing education.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on understanding colonization and decolonization.

Figure 4
Survey 2 Responses to Professional Learning Needs

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on leading my school community to promote Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on leading decolonization.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on Indigenous ways of knowing, learning, and teaching.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on decolonizing education.

- ■ I need more professional learning focused on understanding colonization and decolonization.

In qualitative comments school leaders frequently called for examples of how decolonization and Indigenization looked in other schools. They also asked for opportunites to collaborate with other school leaders to plan for leading this work.

School Leaders Identified that they Needed to Navigate Stress and Workload Challenges from COVID-19 and that Indigenization Provided a Respite. School leaders identified that COVID-19 required a great amout of focus and inflicted signficant stress on school communities. They spoke about the workload of teachers and administrators, including the time spent implementing safety measures, moving into and back from online learning delivery, communicating with stakeholders, and conducting contact tracing. Leaders also spoke about their awareness of COVID-19's impacts on the energy and emotional states of stakeholders. In this context, Leaders talked about their role as "navigating" workloads and stress while trying to encourage action and learning to support decolonization and Indigenization.

More that one leader shared that their school's work on Indigenization offered an "outlet", or a welcome "shift of focus." One Leader referred to this work as a "grounding piece" for them admist the challenges of COVID-19. Another leader shared that their relationship with an Elder was "a huge gift for me to keep that centeredness in my whole leadership practice".

School Leaders Recognize a Need to Hire More Indigenous Leaders, Teachers, and Support Staff. In the interviews school leaders advocated for the importance of having more Indigenous People in support staff, teaching, and leadership positions: "I see access to human resources being a critical barrier, having teachers that speak the language, represent Indigenous identities" (School Leader). One leader spoke about the critical importance of having Indigenous People lead committees and other leadership structures focused on Indigenization. Another leader identified that if "you look at our executive, you look at our leadership team, and we're predominantly white, and there are a lot of white males, if you look at our executive is predominantly white males. When you start thinking about changing the status quo, you start thinking about how that might shake things up". School leaders identified the need for school system level human resource department to support them in increasing representation of Indigenous Peoples.

School Leaders Need to be Supported in the Face of Resistance from Parents When Leading Decolonization and Indigenization. School leaders interviewed felt that they take risk in leading decolonization and Indigenization in their school communities because of resistance from some members of their parent communities. They characterized the resistance as rooted in lack of knowledge, a belief that it is not the school's role to address social equity, fear, and prejudice. This quote illustrates the resistance and the challenge it presents to school leaders:

> When we've talked to school council, particularly over the last few years, where there will be people who bring up contrary perspectives in terms of, "Is this really important? What about other cultures? Why aren't we learning these other things?" Maybe, "Why is it always about the Indigenous people?" There is some bigotry in the community that in small groups sort of pops out, that it is good that we confront that, but it's always challenging and awkward and uninvited as well.

In the face of parent resistance several leaders spoke to the need for "courage," one put it this way: "in order to carry it out with love and not with bias or judgement or assumptions, we need to be grounded".

School Leaders Need Opportunities to Collaborate with One Another on an Ongoing Basis. Through the qualitative survey data school leaders frequently indicated the need to collaborate with colleagues. The main reasons they provided for this need for collaboration were: to learning about how this work looks in other schools; to get guidance and advice on leadership decisions; and to negotiate new understandings. Leaders frequently shared that "uncomfortable" and "intense" conversations were necessary in this work in order to "try to sort through what we've read, what we've learned, what's budding up against our beliefs, what's budding up against what we've always done, what we've always known and how we want to be" (School Leader). One Leader illustrates the kind of collaboration they believe moves forward this learning:

I know you're going to be uncomfortable, that's the biggest thing right there. And people afterwards were uncomfortable, they were like, "I don't want to talk about this", "this made me realize I had to stop listening", "I didn't like the language, felt like blame". So just with my group, I'm like, "Okay, well, let's talk about that." "Why did you feel that way?" "What was your perspective?" "Okay. I heard it this way. How did you hear it?" Those conversations. (School Leader)

School Leaders Need Support From System and Ministry Leaders. School leaders expressed the need for support from sytem and ministry leaders. Many called for a long term commitment to the work and expressed concern that the school division could shift focus away from this work or the Ministry of Education could make changes to policy before the learning becomes sustained action at the classroom and community level. School leaders also spoke to the importance of feeling supported as they lead their school communities into "controversial" topics. One school leader suggested this begins with having system and ministry leaders clearly articulate the importance of this work. Another offered that system leaders need to engage in decolonoization and Indigenization of their leadership practices alongside school leaders. It was also frequently shared that school leaders need support with budget targeted towards this work. School leaders also referenced the need for divisonal based staff to cooridate the work and put "vision into action" (School Leader).

Theme 2: School Leadership for Decolonization and Indigenization
In this second theme I chronicle what schools in this study were engaged in towards decolonization and Indigenization. I take a broad view of what consituted leadership and share the iniatives that occured in schools towards decolonization and Indigenization organized into findings. I pay particular attention to detailing the role school leaders played in each finding. My aim in this section is to present the work that is occuring in schools to provide practitioners, researchers, and policy makers with an opportunity to interpret possibilities for their own context.

School Leadership Involves Working to Combat Racism. School leaders articulated that it is important for them to be an anti-racism leader. Four of the leaders interviewed shared stories of confronting racism in their school with students, teachers, and parents. They spoke about not letting "micro-agressions" or "stereotypes" be allowed to go unchecked and the importance of having the difficult conversations that both educate others and "through firm and kind seeting of boundaries" make it clear that racism is not acceptable in the school (School Leader).

Leaders spoke about creating avenues to build relationships with and hear from Indigenous students and other racialized students about their experiences in school; these avenues included one-on-one interviews; student surveys; and a "Principal's Advisory Council". They shared that in hearing directly from students about their experiences they could identify the work they needed to do to advance inclusion.

Leaders also raised the importance of addressing racism in school naming and symbology. In one context a leader shared the neccisity and challenge of taking on a school renaming process in order to disassociate with racism connected to the school's namesake. In another context a leader led the community to reframe a school logo towards a "strength based" identification of Indigenous identity. In both of these cases the school leaders idnetifed the importance of these initiatives in part lied in the visibility of them and identified them as an opportunity to engage stakeholders and educate on anti-racism.

School Leadership Involves Fostering Relationships with Indigenous Elders. School leaders in this study underscored the importance of fostering relationships between their school communities and Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers. In the schools in this study this took the forms of: having Elders lead professional learning for teachers on the land or via video conferencing; having Elders be a part of school assemblies and events; having Elders teach language and cultural lessons to students; having Elders offer guidance on school leadership decisions (such as the creation of a new logo or land acknowledgment); and having Elders support the professional learning of school leaders.

School Leaders shared that the impacts of Elders in their school communities included: increased student, teacher, leader, and parent Indigenous Knowledge; increased the value stakeholders placed on, and demand for, Indigenous Knowledge, resources, and experiences; increased the use of Indigenous Languages within the school; and provided a "calming," "grounding," or "spiritual" influence.

Some school leaders in this study identified that they played a role in reaching out to and building re-

lationships with Elders on behalf of the school. They spoke about learning protocols for showing respect to Elders and the efforts they took to welcome the Elder into the school community in good ways.

School leaders played an administrative role in supporting the fostering of relationships with Elders. This included allocating budget and seeking for grants to fund opportunities, and working with the school district to allow for gifts of tabocco and cash honorariums. More than one school leaders suggested that the school district could support school leaders by creating system policy around working with Elders.

School Leadership Involves Designing Learning for Teachers to Understand Decolonization and their Professional Responsibilities to this Work.

> So I think it's our teachers being very aware and having that heart set. And I think that's where our biggest challenge is. I think that we can teach people the content, we can teach pedagogy, but it's that heart set where they connect with what's happened and feel a responsibility to make change in our nation. And that's our greatest hope, to do that is work with our youth and to get them to that space of awareness and action as well. (School Leader)

The above quote is representative of the passion with which several of the school leaders spoke about the role of connecting teachers with an urgent moral imperative. Leaders shared many ways in which they are seeking to do this. Several leaders articulated the importance of clearly communicating the priority of this work. Professional learning was often cited with examples such as: engaging in the blanket exercise; working with and Indigenous scholar to develop shared understanding of colonization, systemic racism, and decolonization; presenting "firsthand testimonies from people that have experienced trauma"; and engaging in shared book studies.

A shared theme was the need for an ongoing and longterm commitment to this work because: "racism and all the isms are pervasive. So if we were to swing that and shift that boat, we have to be pervasive on the other way, it can't be lip service. It's just got to seep into everything that we do." One leader shared that they used the Teaching Quality Standard (which in Alberta includes a competency about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Knowledge) as an opportunity to embed this work in teacher professional growth plan meetings, teacher evaluations, and teacher professional learning.

Leading teachers into uncomfortable conversations was stated by many as neccesary in this work. Leaders described the need to "create spaces of non-judgement, of vulnerability, where you share your own biases or mistakes" (School Leader). This required a leader to "keep aware of where people are at and be responsive, but always keeping pushing forward to make sure that these practices are put into place" (School Leader). Leaders also spoke to the need to find spaces for "lightheartedness." Several pointed to valuable role humor often plays in the teachings of Indigenous Elders.

School Leadership Involves Supporting Teachers to Weave Indigenous Perspectives Into Inquiry-based Learning. School leaders shared that one of the most significant ways Indiginization was being advanced in their school community was thorugh classroom inquiry projects in which Indigenous perspectives were meaningfully woven into the study of curriculum. In four different contexts, classroom inquiry work involved students working with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge over a long term relationship and through cross curicular learning. The projects involved making the learning visible to the broader school community in a myraid of ways including: school wide cultural events; community exhibitions of student learning; and the publishing of learning stories through YouTube video, local media coverage, and school communication channels (hallway televisions, website, newsletter). School leaders spoke of a "ripple" effect these projects had on the school community. One leader framed the impact this way:

> Our whole school community benefitted from this and it permeates and supports other teachers to fully understand the importance and also the benefit of including the indigenous perspectives and promote indigenous ways of knowing, learning and teaching into their everyday classes. (School Leader)

In more than one school, individual classroom inquiry projects blossomed into school wide learning

opportunities and inspired many other teachers to engage in this work. Adding to the description of the impact of this work, leaders spoke to how students brought learning home to parents and the result was new understandings for parents and in one school new advocacy and support for Indiginization work in parent council.

School leaders identified the importance of providing professional learning to support teachers to weave Indigeneous perspectives across multiple curriculum areas. In one school a professional development day featured an Indigenous Knowledge Keeper sharing Indigenous Knowledge and resources and then teachers working together to plan for bringing what was shared into their classrooms. In another school, a professional development day featured staff learning on the land in with an Indigenenous Elder, followed by time to plan for taking students out on the land. School Leaders facilitated these learning opportunities, supported them with budget, and played an active role in the days to underscore their importance.

Leaders spoke about creating an environment of risk taking and getting past fear of making mistakes. They believed that fostering strong relationship with their teachers was important for this along with providing time and facilitation for teams of teachers to engage in this work together.

Other ways School leaders supported teachers in this work included: supporting the relationship with the Elder or Knowledge Keeper; providing encouragement and acknowledgement of the teacher; providing administrative support including budget, paperwork, and navigating policies; recognizing the momentum and building professional learning from the inspiration; and supporting making the learning visible.

School Leadership Involves Supporting Learning from the Land. Several Leaders identified that land based learning was an important component of Indigenization at their school. Leaders reported increased interest in learning outdoors from both teachers and parents as a result of COVID-19 safety recommendations and masking protocols. Connected to this Leaders believed that land based learning had a positive influence on wellness for students, teachers, and themselves. One Leader spoke about the increased interest in learning outdoors as an opportunity to include Indigenous Knowledge into their school. To support this the Leader facilitated professional learning where teachers went out on the land with an Indigenous Elder. Other examples of leadership to support this work included: streamlining the off-school paperwork process; purchasing outdoor sit pads and clipboards; and repurposing an area of the school yard for outdoor learning.

School Leadership Involves Creating Structures to Co-lead the Work. In several schools, school leaders created shared leadership structures (named committees or councils) to advance the work of decolonization and Indigenization. In all contexts the committee/council involved teachers, leaders, and staff, in one case it also included parents and students. Some of the responsibilities of these structures included building relationships with Elders, planning school wide events/initiatives, designing professional learning, and curating resources. In several cases the committees/councils engaged in leadership practices inspired by Indigenous ways of being. Examples of this include sharing circles, consensus models of decision making, and witnessing. School leaders believed that these structures were important because: they provided a broader base for the leadership of the work; activated the knowledge, experience, and passion of stakeholders towards leadership; and offered a "safe" and "caring" environment to support the sometimes challenging nature of leading this work. School leaders supported these structures by forming them, empowering them with scope and budget, and participating in them as active members.

School Leadership Involves Including Indigenous Persepectives in School Events, Communications, Practices, and Resources. School leaders in this study underscored the importance of including Indigenous perspectives in the school. As one leader put it: "it needs to be in math, it needs to be in literacy, it needs to be in science, it needs to be in social, it needs to be in fine arts, it needs to be in music, and it needs to be everywhere in my school." Examples shared of where school leaders intentionally including Indigenous Knowledge included: announcements; assemblies; hallway televisions; weekly newsletter to parents; weekly newsletter to teachers; visuals/art around the school; staff meetings; parent counil meetings; sports day; concerts; sporting events; library books and resources; classroom libraries and instructional materials; school website; school social media presence; and professional learning days.

In all cases it was the school leader or a shared leadership committee/council who was responsible

for creating and carrying out these instances of including Indigenous perspectives. Leaders spoke of the importance of their own professional learning as well as their relationships with Indigenous Elders as the foundation for the knowledge that they then shared with the school. School leaders shared the importance of "hiring the right people" to "create the rumble and stir the conversation…who believe that the work is important."

School Leaders Advanced Indigenous Inclusion Alongsde and in Relationship with School Inclusion More Broadly Defined. School leaders articulated connections between including Indigenous perspectives and the work of school inclusion. One leader framed it this way: "Indigenous inclusion is inclusion. And it's from a very important and unique perspective and lens." Another leader added: "sometimes the disconnect that people have, they think that Indigenization is like a separate piece, but it's actually just very good practice to uphold the humanity and the value of each and every human being." In several contexts leaders shared ways in which thcir school community was drawing on "Indigenous practices and teachings to support inclusiveness as a whole." Examples of this include sharing circles, restorative justice practices, and medicine wheel teachings. To move forward these synergies, School Leaders identifed the importance of including learning support teachers, teaching assistants, and other school support staff in professional learning and in shared leadership structures tasked with advancing Indigenization.

School Leadership Involves Designing Learning for Parents to Help them Understand the Need for this Work. Leading parents on the journey to decolonization and Indigenization was identified by all of the leaders interviewed when asked. However all six also qualified that they felt they were at the beginning stage of exploring how to do this. Leaders believed that parents are an important audience because they can be strong advocates or alternatively create resistance to this work.

In one school, parents were included in a book club focused on Residential Schools. In another school the leader designed learning opportunities as a regular agenda item at school council meetings. All six leaders interviewed spoke about school newsletters, websites, and social media as opportunities to reach parents. As touched on earlier, four leaders spoke about how inquiry based student learning offered parent learning opportunities. In speaking about this phenomenon one leader described a parent's learning journey: "She's learned more from her daughter's learning than she has in her entire life. That's pretty impactful, and I see that continuing to proliferate as long as we continue to make it our priority."

Conclusion

In conclusion I reflect on the findings of this study with the aim of opening up possibilities. The findings of this study were created to support the development of next steps in professional learning and school district supports in year two of the project. In the conclusion I have tried to draw on the theoretical framework and look across the findings. I have created two big questions framed as design challenges to inform possibilities within the context of this study and for educators, policy makers, and educational researchers leading decolonization and Indigenization work in the ongoing pandemic and beyond.

How Might We Connect All School Stakeholders to the Importance of Decolonization and Indigenization?

A focus in this study was the importance of a moral imperative to the work of school leadership for decolonization and Indigenization. School Leaders were passionate about the importance of this work and spoke passionately about the need to connect teachers to a moral imperative. They shared stories of hightly engaged students and teachers who influenced their school community. They identified that parent perspectives on the importance of this work could be a barrier or a leverage point and they called for system and minstry leaders to articulate and act on the priority of this work.

This study also provides some ways forward for building a moral imperative. Professional learning played a central role in connecting teachers and leaders to the importance of decolonization and Indigenization. Building relationship with and learning from Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers was also key. This study pointed to ways in which this work interconnected with and was mutually beneficial towards wellness, engagement, and inclusion. Further exploration of these interconnections may open more possibilities for connecting stakeholders to the importance of this work.

How Might We Ensure that Indigenous People are at the Forefront of Leading Decolonization and Indigenization in Schools?

Indigenous Elders were instrumental to the professional learning and leadership practice of school leaders and to the learning of students, teachers, and parents in this study. School leaders identified that greater access to Elders was needed and that more Indigenous teachers and leaders needed to be hired. I believe that an opportunity exists for practioners, researchers, and policy makers to explore how to meet these important needs.

In addition to addressing the need for more Elders and Indigenous teachers and leaders, I wonder how we might position Indigenous students and Indigenous parents in school communities as leaders of decolonization and Indigenization of schools. This study pointed to the power of student voice, and the potential of parent advocacy. I believe this study opens up promising avenues for further exploration of how inquiry-based learning centres student voice in this work. Connected to this, I wonder how we might shift the hierarchal structures and reframe school leadership as a collective engagement perhaps by further exploring how leadership practices can be inspired by Indigenous ways of being. Lastly, this project represented an exploration of how research partnerships can support decolonization and Indigenization of schools. I am interested in further exploring what conditions need to be in place and how partnerships can be best framed to support Indigenous scholars to contribute to this work.

References

Alberta Education. (2005). *Social studies: Kindergarten to Grade 12*. https://education.alberta.ca/media/3273004/social-studies-k-6-pos.pdf

Alberta Education. (2018). *Teacher quality standard*. https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/4596e0e5-bcad-4e93-a1fb-dad8e2b800d6/resource/75e96af5-8fad-4807-b99a-f12e26d15d9f/download/edc-alberta-education-teaching-quality-standard-2018-01-17.pdf

Azorín, C. (2020). Beyond COVID-19 supernova. Is another education coming? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, *5*(3/4), 381-390. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-05-2020-0019

Barab, S. (2014). Design-based research: A methodological toolkit for engineering change. In R. K. Sawyer (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of the learning sciences* (2nd ed., pp.151–170). Cambridge University Press.

Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit.* Purich.

Chambers, C. (2004). Research that matters: Finding a path with heart. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, *2*(1), 1-19.

Chu, M-W., Brown, B., & Friesen, S. (2020). *Psychometric properties of the design-based professional learning for teachers survey.* Professional Development in Education. https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1709219

Dei, G. J. S., James, I. M., Karumanchery, L. L., James-Wilson, S., & Zine, J. (2000). *Removing the margins: The challenges and possibilities of inclusive schooling.* Canadian S cholars' Press.

Donald, D. (2014) *Teaching and learning from aboriginal perspectives in the social studies classroom*. CAP Final Report, Edmonton. http://galileo.org/pl/wp- content/uploads/CAP-Report_D.Donald.docx

Ermine, W. (2007). Ethical space of engagement. *Indigenous Law Journal, 6*(1), 193– 203.

Hargreaves, A., & Fullan, M. (2020), Professional capital after the pandemic: revisiting and revising classic understandings of teachers' work. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, *5*(3/4), 327-336. https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-06-2020-0039

Hill, J. T. (2020). *Designing for a school system that learns* [Unpublished doctoral thesis]. University of Calgary. http://hdl.handle.net/1880/112534

Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts.* University of Toronto Press.

Louie, D. L., Poitras Pratt, Y., Hanson, A. J., & Ottmann, J. (2017). Applying Indigenizing principles of decolonizing methodologies in university classrooms. *Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 47*(3), 16–33. https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.v47i3.187948

Louie, D., & Prince, L. (2021, May 29-June 2). Embedding decolonizing and Indgenizing approaches in public education through a district model. Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Conference, University of Alberta, AB.

Miles, M., Huberman, A., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis. A methods sourcebook.* SAGE Publications, Inc.

National Indian Assembly of First Nations. (1972). *First Nations control of First Nations*

education. https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/3._2010_july_afn_first_nations_control_of_first_nations_education_final_eng.pdf

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). *Report on the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People.* https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/aboriginal-heritage/royal-commission-aboriginal-peoples/Pages/final-report.aspx

Smith, L. T. (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2nd ed.). Zed Books.

Standing Senate Committee on Aboringial Peoples. (2011). *Second report.* https://sencanada.ca/en/Content/SEN/Committee/411/appa/07rp-e

Styres, S. (2019). Pathways for remembering and (re)cognizing Indigenous thought in education In H. Tomlins-Jahnke, S. Styres, S. Lilley, & D. Zinga (Eds.), *Indigenous education: New directions in theory and practice* (pp. 39-62). University of Alberta Press.

United Nations. (2007). *United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous People.* https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf