

There is a longing
among the youth of my nation
To secure for themselves and their people
the skills that will provide them
with a sense of purpose and worth.

They will be our new warriors;
their training will be much longer
and more demanding
than it was in the olden days...

But they will emerge with
their hand held forward
not to receive welfare,
but to grasp a place in society
that is rightly ours.

Chief Dan George (1989)

**UNDERSTANDING EDUCATOR, PARENT, AND COMMUNITY
EXPECTATIONS IN A FIRST NATIONS SCHOOL CONTEXT**

by

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ABSTRACT

There is an achievement gap between Indigenous students living on reserve and other students in Canada. The Auditor General of Canada (2018) reported that the gap has widened in the last 15 years. Indigenous peoples see academic education as a pathway to participate actively in society, both as individuals and in community. This research examined expectations—a driver for school success—through the lens of cultural capital.

The research questions were: *How do teachers understand the cultural capital that First Nations parents transfer to their children and how does this understanding affect their teaching practices, particularly practices linked to expectations? What spaces are created to cultivate teachers' understandings and actions upon cultural capital understanding?*

The literature revealed aspects of cultural capital that matter across ethnicities when it comes to achievement: literacy habits and parental involvement. Secondary questions included elder and parental expectations. Findings revealed that cultural capital theory does not sufficiently encompass the interdependent layers of institutional, family, and community beliefs and pedagogical practices that link classrooms, band-operated schools, public schools, and homes. Learning environments, Indigenous cultures, and the very purpose of education challenged the theoretical context of this research: social reproduction and cultural capital theories.

This study found there is a lack of alignment and trust between educators and parents/caregivers. Years of oppression and racism in the school systems mean that

parents, caregivers, and the community do not trust the school.

The purpose of education in a band-operated school needs to be commonly understood as being both academic and cultural. A learning context where Indigenous and Western knowledge and worldviews are equally valued would foster more student success. A trusting learning environment and stronger relationships with families and communities are necessary to align expectations and close the achievement gap.

Participants said their schools are becoming more inclusive of their culture. They proposed strategies to keep building trusting relationships with families. My findings will contribute to Indigenous leaders advocating for a more effective education for their children by ensuring that culture is part of that education.

DEDICATION

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my grandchildren and to the participants' grandchildren. May they live on a land where Indigenous cultures, languages, and knowledges are respected and valued and where concepts such as “achievement gaps” are a thing of the past.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Reflections

1.1 The Context

This research was conducted on Indigenous lands. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (2013) described Indigenous peoples as “descendants of the original people or occupants of lands before these lands were taken over or conquered by others” (p. 33). I use the term *Indigenous* in this dissertation to recognize that in this research, Indigenous participants and their communities are the descendants of the original original peoples or occupants of lands before Settlers arrived. I sometimes use the term *Aboriginal* when another author has chosen this term.

Statistics Canada has reported consistently high secondary school non-graduation rates of 51% (2001) and 52% (2006) for Indigenous on-reserve residents aged 20 to 24 (Simeone, 2011). Unfortunately, the situation is not improving. The Assembly of First Nations (2012) stated that less than 60% of Indigenous people living on reserve aged 20 to 24 had graduated from high school. In a recent report, Anderson and Richards (2016) found that only 4 out of 10 young people living on reserve in Canada finish high school, providing further evidence to support Parkin's (2015) statement that the education gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students is expanding. The Office of Auditor General of Canada (2018) reported that the achievement gap has actually widened in the last 15 years for Indigenous students living on reserve. In short, the present Canadian education system is failing to eliminate the education gap between First Nations children and other children (Anderson & Richards, 2016; Parkin, 2015). Nevertheless, education

remains a priority for Indigenous peoples in urban, rural, and remote communities (Colomb, 2012). Among Indigenous peoples, formal education is generally recognized as a means to participate actively in society and to influence one's own life, including community life (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). Academic education is important in today's Indigenous worldview as Indigenous education is a process that evolves. Education for Indigenous children cannot be framed by traditional cultural practices only (Laramee, 2008). But still, a gap exists. The adverse consequences of Residential Schools and the continuous oppression of First Nations in Canada explain the low starting point First Nations band-run schools inherited nearly four decades ago (Battiste, 2017; Colomb, 2012). However, these factors fail to explain why high school completion is still so low, especially given the variability in average performances between First Nations schools and the abundance of cases of excellence (Battiste, 2002).

The following are examples of cases of excellence. Through a partnership with St. Francis Xavier University, teachers in Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey schools in Nova Scotia received professional development and saw student scores in mathematics rise by 6.7 percent between 2010 and 2012 (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), 2012). Stoney Education Authority in Alberta invested in music education to increase students' self-esteem, attendance, and academic performance (AANDC, 2012). An e-learning program for rural Labrador Aboriginal communities helped students successfully complete high school courses (Philpott, Sharpe, & Neville, 2009). In New Brunswick, Eel Ground First Nation has seen its school population triple since first opening its doors by mixing technology and traditional cultural teachings (AANDC,

2012). Nevertheless, although success stories do exist, the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (2004; 2010) has stated that much more needs to be done to improve student achievement and the rate of high school graduation for First Nations students. This is the case in New Brunswick as in other provinces.

This research takes the point of view that there is a desire among First Nation communities and families that their children succeed in school and that the learning gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students needs to be closed (New Brunswick Chiefs, New Brunswick Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Affairs, 2011). While I recognize unequivocally the importance of First Nation students learning their native language—for without their language they lose their identity and Canadians as a whole lose a very rich point of view and knowledge—the starting point of this research was the current situation in New Brunswick. Although there is presently a debate on the language of instruction in many First Nations communities, in this research I investigated at what is happening now with First Nations student education in New Brunswick. The current language of instruction for First Nations children in New Brunswick, as for non-Indigenous students, is French or English. In other words, this study is situated within the current language realities of an officially bilingual province while investigating the immediate need to improve graduation rates of Indigenous students (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2004; 2011). In this study I address ways to influence student success in their present linguistic learning context, while taking into consideration participants' expectations for First Nations students whenever it differed from the present linguistic learning context. The following quotation, from Atleo's open letter to the minister of

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, sums it up very well:

First Nations children must now be nurtured in an environment that affirms their dignity, rights and their identity, including their languages and cultures. First Nations education systems must be enabled, supported and funded in a way that ensures they can design programming that achieves this imperative. Moreover, as a country, and as part of reconciliation, Canada must recognize the importance of First Nations languages and cultures as foundational to this land. (Atleo, 2013, p. 3)

While recognizing the importance of First Nations and languages and cultures, in research I investigated ways to impact Indigenous student success through a cultural capital lens in the present linguistic context. I explored how teachers perceive the cultural capital—the attitudes, values, knowledge and skills—that First Nations parents and caregivers transfer to their children, and how these perceptions influence their expectations of First Nations students in band-operated schools. I strove to understand how to create a respectful learning environment that affirms First Nations children’s dignity, rights, and identity and improves their school success, retention, and graduation rates.

1.2 In New Brunswick

The province of New Brunswick is the traditional territory of the Wolastoqey, Passamaquoddy, and Mi’kmaq peoples. There are presently 15 First Nations communities in the province. These communities are either Wolastoqey or Mi’kmaq, as Canadian laws deny the Passamaquoddy people Indigenous rights. Of these 15 communities, only seven have a band-operated elementary school. No New Brunswick First Nations community has a secondary school. In the other eight communities, all children start school in the public system in a nearby community. This also means that in order to graduate, all First

Nations students will need to go to a public school at some point in their schooling career. In the 2015-2016 school year there were 1356 on-reserve First Nations students attending public schools and a little over 700 students attending band-operated schools (Aboriginal Affairs Secretariat, 2016).

In New Brunswick, First Nations students are three times more likely to not finish high school than provincial Settlers (Richard, 2010). Indigenous children, whether attending on- or off-reserve schools, are scoring significantly lower than other New Brunswick children on provincial standardized tests (Richard, 2010). While studies have shown that these tests are not culturally appropriate and that they reproduce social class and race inequity (Berlak, 2005; Tuck & Gorlewski, 2016), in this study I worked within the current testing realities as I examined the immediate need to improve graduation rates of Indigenous students, beginning in the early years of schooling. In the present context, scoring lower than other New Brunswick students limits First Nation youths' future employment opportunities, as half the jobs in Canada require at least a high school diploma (Ministers' National Working Group on Education, 2002). This is significant, as the Indigenous population in New Brunswick is younger than the Settler population. In 2011, 27% of the Settler population in New Brunswick was under 25 years old whereas 42% of the Indigenous population was under 25 years old (Chernikova, 2016). In 2017, there were 16,123 First Nations people in New Brunswick, including 9,732 living on reserve (New Brunswick Aboriginal Affairs, 2018).

For most students to graduate, they must be present at school and benefit from high expectations from both parents or caregivers and teachers starting at the beginning of

their schooling career. I therefore conducted this study in one Grade 2 class and two Grade 3 classes in two different band-operated schools in New Brunswick. One school is in a Wolastoqey community and the other is in a Mi'kmaq community. Both of these communities are close to a town or a city and therefore have access to many services. It was important to choose pertinent questions that would contribute to the conversations regarding educators' perceptions of cultural capital and how those perceptions impact achievement for First Nation students.

1.3 The Research Questions

In the context of the First Nation-Settler achievement gap and in recognition that schooling is a Settler concept within Indigenous contexts, in the research process it was important for me to strive to understand each of the questions and answers through the multiple perspectives of elders, educators, and parents. Researchers (Dixon-Romàn & Gutiérrez, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2007) have shown that the concept of an achievement gap encourages negative discourse regarding marginalized peoples, keeping them “locked in a deficit paradigm” (Ladson-Billings, 2007, p. 316). This deficit paradigm strengthens the power relationships that exist in our society where assumptions and understandings regarding child rearing, education, and evaluation are framed by the dominant group and are never questioned (Moss, 2001). This discourse leads researchers and decision makers to view the achievement gap through an academic lens rather than questioning the system itself. The structural racism in institutions resulting from generations of social injustice remains hidden behind the achievement gap concept (Dixon-Romàn & Gutiérrez, 2011, Ladson-Billings, 2007). The reason I included the achievement gap concept in this

research is that Indigenous researchers, leaders, and educators (including participants in this research) have expressed a desire to close the achievement gap. Indigenous voices of both participants in this research and researchers are calling for an education system that is more respectful of their cultures. Moreover, participants in this research have proposed solutions that do not limit the achievement gap concept to a deficit discourse.

The aim of the research is to offer possibilities for practical actions to support First Nation parents and communities advocating for their children, to inform teacher learning, and to contribute to supporting Indigenous students on their path to success. In this study I looked at teacher expectations, a driver for educational achievement, through the lens of cultural capital. Cultural capital theory seeks to understand how parental practices influence children's school success, among other things. To understand the dynamics between cultural capital and educator expectations I formulated the following question:

How do teachers understand the cultural capital that First Nations parents transfer to their children and how does this understanding affect their teaching practices, particularly practices linked to expectations? What spaces are created to cultivate teachers' understandings and actions upon cultural capital understanding?

A thorough literature review prior to gathering data led me to understand the key aspects of cultural capital that matter across ethnicities when it comes to achievement: literacy habits and parental involvement. This helped me formulate secondary questions that led me to a better understanding of how to support First Nations student success:

1. *How do teachers understand the literacy habits of First Nation students?*

How does this understanding affect their teaching practices, particularly practices linked to expectations? How do the teachers adapt their pedagogy when it comes to literacy in order to respond culturally to the needs of First Nations families? How do teachers understand First Nation parental involvement when it comes to literacy habits? How do elders understand literacy, both at school and at home?

2. *How do teachers understand parental involvement regarding education?*

How does this understanding affect their communication with parents, particularly practices linked to expectations? How do teachers adapt their communication practices to respond culturally to the needs of First Nations families? How do elders understand parental involvement and communication with parents?

3. *How do parents or caregivers define their child's success? How do parents or*

caregivers understand their child's potential and their own role when it comes to activating that potential? How does this understanding influence the expectations they have for their child? How do elders define children's success?

How do parents or caregivers understand teachers' expectations when it comes to their child? How do elders understand teachers' expectations?

In this research, I learned from the interdependent layers of institutional, family, and community beliefs and pedagogical practices that link classrooms, First Nation schools, public schools, and homes. My learning prompted me to expand my reading of the literature beyond cultural capital and expectations, which were the areas I focused on

when writing the research questions. I also needed to add literature on culture. The end results led to a new framework. This new framework, which I call the *Education Success Map*, can contribute to shaping policies, school plans, and teaching practices.

In the next sections I position myself as a researcher by reflecting on the multiple experiences that have had an impact on my thinking: personal, professional, poetic, and my own people's history. In Chapter 2 I explore Bourdieu's theoretical framework while focusing on cultural capital theory. I then explore how expectations, literacy, and parental involvement fit within cultural capital theory and how they influence school success. Finally, I also examine how studies can or cannot be applied across ethnic borders. In Chapter 3 I discuss grounded theory and Indigenous methodologies before explaining my research model. In this chapter I describe the methodology that framed the analysis and interpretations of the data. In Chapter 4 I present my findings along with many quotes from participants in order to honour their voices. I include limitations of this study in this chapter. In Chapter 5 I discuss what those findings mean and how they align—or do not align—with research. It is in this chapter that I present my *Education Success Map*, a tool to guide First Nations communities to advocate for their children or shape professional learning for educators. In the last chapter I suggest possible directions for new research.

1.4 Reflecting Through the Lens of Personal Experience

The statistics on past school success rates are alarming. As a Settler living in Mi'kmaq territory, I knew that I was part of the problem and I began wondering if I could be part of the solution. I was appointed to a First Nations Committee at the Université de Moncton while I was doing my Master's research, which took me to a First Nations

community in 2005 and 2006. Despite having grown up less than an hour from this community (as well as other First Nations communities nearby), I had never set foot on a reserve or even wondered about life on a reserve. It struck me as strange, maybe even ridiculous, that while I can fluently speak and write in French and English and I know a few words in Spanish and Italian, I did not know one single word in Mi'kmaq—not even *thank you*—even though they were my cultural neighbours. Why was there this invisible wall between us?

It was shocking to discover that I had lived most of my life never questioning the Canadian myth that Canada is not a racist country. Learning how Canada's political structures and policies are anchored within a history of colonialism and paternalism towards First Nations (Mackey, 2002) continues to be a critical part of my research and learning. A little digging and reading opened my eyes to new realities. Long conversations with elders, who took me under their wings, taught me even more about the realities of living on a reserve, including the insecurities and frustrations when trying to take a stand in the Settlers' world. I was honoured to be invited to participate in sweat lodges and other cultural activities such as Pow Wows and Sun Dance ceremonies. I asked questions to understand instead of trying to fit their world into my own worldview. I needed to leave my assumptions behind to fully experience Mi'kmaq cultural ceremonies, to fully understand what is being lost when one loses a culture and a worldview.

Ceremonies are sacred and meaningful for sharing values and culture. I was honoured that they were generously shared with me. I want to point out here that when those of us

with Western views do not leave those views behind to experience these ceremonies, we are at risk of thinking that Indigenous knowledge and worldviews keep its people in the past and therefore inhibit their ability to look into the future. This myth of a backward culture has been sustained through the years by the “persistent and aggressive assimilation plan by the Canadian government and the churches through the past century, the marginalization of Indigenous knowledge in educational institutions committed to Eurocentric knowledge, and the losses to Aboriginal languages and heritages” (Battiste, 2002, p. 4). There is a body of research stating that Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices are healing for spirit, mind, and body (Carrière, 2005; Mignone & O’Neil, 2005; Schiff & Moore, 2006) and that students achieve better when their schools include their cultural knowledge and practices (e.g. Agbo, 2001; Battiste, 2002). I learned even more about the myths and racisms regarding First Nations on a first-hand basis when I brought my children to visit my elder friends one Sunday afternoon. Someone in the Settler world screamed at me because I had brought my children to such a “dangerous” place. I was thankful that my children did not see what all the fuss was about; they had had a wonderful time.

I learned about the complexity of the band-operated school system and how complexity negatively impacts education (Barman, 2012; Richards, 2008). It is a system where band-operated schools are financed by the federal government at a lower rate than the funding provided for provincial schools (Drummond & Rosenbluth, 2013; Mendelson, 2014) and where principals try to follow provincial curricula but do not have access to the same provincial professional development or learning specialists that public school principals

do. I learned that teachers in a band-operated school are paid less than teachers in a public school.

Even more perniciously, the band-operated school system that makes it mandatory for an individual school, through their Band Council, to *apply* for funding. In the public school system, the system itself makes it easier to develop initiatives while the Ministries of Education and school districts look after the larger financial matters. In the public school system, initiatives such as basic professional development or hiring people to write policies that will help principals lead schools are automatically funded and are taken for granted by many public school educators and leaders. This is not the reality in First Nations band-operated schools. I was shocked at this discovery. As I was a school principal myself at the time of my visits to a band-operated school, I wondered how much more difficult it would be to lead a school without policies to help guide decisions and without professional development from the district or the province. Additional challenges include high staff turnover because of the draw of higher salaries and benefits in the Settler schools just 10 minutes away and fewer networking possibilities with other principals to share effective strategies and concerns. These discoveries cemented my desire to learn more about the issues of First Nations education in New Brunswick.

1.5 Reflecting Through the Lens of Professional Experiences

In 2013, after several years of experience in the public school system, including doing communications, being an education director, and working as a provincial literacy specialist, I took on the position of professional development specialist in a university-based literacy initiative for First Nations students aged 4 to 8. For the next two school

years I worked with 33 First Nations band-operated schools across Canada. All these schools were part of First Nations Student Success organizations, in which aggregates of schools on a given territory apply for funding as a larger collective. On the surface, they may look like a school district, with a director and learning specialists or learning consultants. However, unlike a school district, they have no authority over schools. They work within the circle of the power of influence. It is at times very challenging work. While a school district receives a budget from the provincial government, these aggregates need to apply annually to get funding. It was quite different from my days as a school district education director; I would shake my head and try to imagine what it would have been like to spend a lot of my time filling out long application forms instead of concentrating on improving education for the students and tending to current issues. It was yet another instance of how First Nations communities need to struggle to obtain the same taken-for-granted conditions and support that Settler organizations enjoy.

The work I did during those two years to develop and deliver professional development for effective teaching and literacy was framed within a collaborative partnership with First Nations Education aggregates and First Nations schools. This work was guided by OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) principles (First Nations Centre des Premières Nations, 2007) and by an advisory circle that included First Nations educational leader representatives from all the aggregates participating in this First Nations literacy initiative. During those two years I spent many hours working with principals, classroom teachers, literacy teachers, and teacher aides in First Nations schools in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and

Labrador. I had meaningful conversations with many children, teenagers, chiefs, parents, grandparents, and elders. I have been invited and felt honoured to participate in smudge ceremonies and one pipe ceremony.

This one pipe ceremony, on Treaty 4 territory (in Saskatchewan), was especially touching for me. Close to where the last residential school closed in 1996, I was invited to an early morning pipe ceremony to honour the beginning of a new school year. I did not understand the words the elders spoke but I understood the emotions inside that tent strongly enough to feel tears rolling down my cheeks. This journey changed the way I perceive how knowledge shapes opinions and worldviews. Specifically, I recognized how Settler knowledge is often taken as the only knowledge that is entitled to shape opinions and worldviews when it comes to education.

Because of all these different experiences and because of relationships I developed with Indigenous people, I am an ally. Only Indigenous peoples can declare someone an ally (Smith, Simon, & Puckett, 2016). I feel honoured that several Indigenous leaders consider me an ally. Allyship is to actively engage in the processes of decolonization. Decolonization includes developing and maintaining relationships with people and communities, recognizing that they lead their initiatives, and eliminating benefits that accrue only to the dominant group (Brown and Ostrove, 2013). I entered this research journey knowing that I am not Indigenous. I had to pay very close attention to Indigenous voices, constantly checking my Settler values and perspectives.

1.6 Reflecting Through the Lens of Poetry

I placed this poem at the very beginning of this dissertation:

There is a longing
among the youth of my nation
To secure for themselves and their people
the skills that will provide them
with a sense of purpose and worth.

They will be our new warriors;
their training will be much longer
and more demanding
than it was in the olden days...

But they will emerge with
their hand held forward
not to receive welfare,
but to grasp a place in society
that is rightly ours.

Chief Dan George (1989)

I find a sense of longing in this poem—a longing, even a desperation, to have an equitable place in a society that is now shaped predominantly by Settlers. I use the word desperation because in the spaces between the words I can read that not to adapt to the Settlers' way of life means a life of poverty (“their hand held forward / not to receive welfare”). And so I wonder: Is this a fair statement? Isn't this welfare self-image destructive? Should wealth be measured by money only? Why is it that the image of “purpose and worth” is rooted in money? Just how much has Western thinking tainted First Nations worldviews?

This poem speaks of a people who need to gather the courage and strength to take the lead and find their rightful place in society (“They will be our new warriors”). An elder

participant in this research explained that from a First Nations perspective, warriors are people who are brave, generous, peaceful, loving, and spiritual. They are leaders. With this definition of warriors, the poem speaks of how these “new warriors” will know how to take their rightful place in society without forgetting who they are. As I am an educator, for me the natural next step is to ask the question: How can schools support these young warriors as they struggle to grasp a place in society without forgetting who they are? As I stated earlier, too few Indigenous students are graduating.

In recent years, as I worked closely with First Nations education leaders and conducted my research in First Nations settings, I have seen examples of First Nations schools trying to develop a culturally-appropriate approach to education because they realize that a purely Western education diminishes, even destroys, the importance of First Nations teachings. At the same time, they want their children to succeed academically because they want them to have all the opportunities that Settler children are perceived to have. This requires a Western education. This tension is particularly acute in New Brunswick, where there are no First Nations high schools. How do First Nations students recognize themselves in our Settler public schools? How do educators and school systems value the cultural capital First Nations students bring to school?

Working in First Nations schools, I have learned so many things that I feel should be part of any school system. I have learned the importance of relationships. I have learned the power of positive imagery. In each professional development module I created, I included a video that showed First Nations children and their teacher in engaged positive relationships, where children were learning and where a particular teaching practice was

featured. My desire to show positive First Nations imagery is anchored in recent judgments from the Supreme Court of Canada. Graham (2015) recently reported that Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin stated that the best way to change stereotypes of Indigenous people in Canada is through videos and modern electronic media. According to the same article, this echoes the opinion of Judge Sinclair, who led the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015): “Probably the world of media, the world of image portrayal is the most significant area of potential public education because the way that we project images into peoples [*sic*] minds, whether through the written word or through the video or through pictures, has a dramatic impact upon how they see people in reality.” The more positive images, the more possible it becomes to create a new narrative where First Nations culture is valued both in the classroom and elsewhere in society.

These experiences helped prepare me as I started working part-time in September 2015 for the New Brunswick Department of Education and Development of Early Childhood Education (EECD) as a Director for First Nations Perspectives. Part of my role there was to lead the development of resources for the classroom in order to better understand First Nation histories, treaties, and the legacy of residential schools. Videos, imagery, and media exchanges are an important component of these resources, as is consulting with elders and other First Nations education leaders. My experiences provided me with the complementary theoretical apparatus to balance my graduate and professional experiences and my knowledge of First Nations education in New Brunswick. Step by step, life had led me to this research. I believe that this study can contribute to a process

and a conversation that will generate useful actions for First Nations children and their communities.

I offer findings that will provide not only theoretical understandings but practical information to support First Nations parents and communities as they advocate for their children within and outside of the community, in both band-operated and provincial schools. Schools themselves are a Western paradigm, but they do exist in the current iteration of First Nations communities in Canada. The First Nations people I have met define success as helping each child walk confidently in both worlds: in the English or French Settler world where economic, political, and environmental decisions are made and where work and study opportunities exist; and in their own native-language worlds where the heartbeat of their identity lies and their worldviews are shaped. As more and more Indigenous people graduate, they will have increasing participatory power in economic, political, and environmental decisions affecting their people. They will shape those decisions within their worldviews. This is one of the main reasons education is important to Indigenous peoples: education provides more choices regarding where and how to live (Assembly of First Nations, 2010).

In the world today there is much fluidity of cultural ideas and worldviews that results from travel and the Internet. It is time not only to respect and be inclusive of different cultures but also to embrace what they have to offer in order to widen understandings of self, others, and the world. Hart (2002), an associate professor with the Canadian Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledges and Social Work, claimed research was necessary because realities have changed, even in Indigenous societies. I did this research

in First Nations communities because I embraced Indigenous epistemology and because I believed it was important for non-Indigenous researchers—Settlers who are part of both the problem and the solution to educational and cultural inequities—to adopt elements of Indigenous research. Valuable and credible research methodologies should not come from Western paradigms only. Indigenous epistemology helps broaden the ways we perceive the world, contributes to richer findings and better scholarship, and creates ethical and inclusionary spaces of participation in the production of cultural knowledge. I also did research in First Nations communities because the relationships I have developed there have lead me to a place where doing research feels like a natural next step in the collaborative work I have been doing in First Nations schools for many years now.

1.7 Reflecting Through the Lens of my People’s History

I agree with Smith (1999) when she writes that the “post” in postcolonialism leads to the impression that colonialism is over. The effects of colonialism are very real and still very present in First Nations communities. It would be more appropriate to use “colonialism awareness” to explain how a deep understanding of the effects of colonialism must always be present throughout the research process and educational practices.

Even with that understanding, the impacts of colonialism can never inhabit my being, for it is not my story, nor have I been socialized in this group. There is an intuitive sensitivity that I cannot pretend to have. The closest I can come to that intuitive sensitivity is to draw upon my own people’s story and reflect on it. I am Acadian, which means that my people have their own story of oppression. From 1755 to 1762, British governor Winslow organized the deportation of Acadians because of their refusal to bear arms in the French-

English wars (Thibodeau, 2010). Considering themselves neither French nor British, the Acadians simply wanted to farm their lands and live in peace. The British army did not trust this attitude, feeling it was a veiled threat. Of the 13,500 Acadians in the Maritimes, it is estimated that over 12,600 were deported during this period (Leblanc, 1979). Families were separated, put in the holds of boats for months, and sailed to France, England, Virginia, New Orleans, New England, and other states, where illness, malnutrition, indecent living conditions, and shipwrecks killed half of the deported Acadians (LeBlanc, 1979). It is hard for me to read detailed accounts of those days, for I know it was my grandmothers and grandfathers who were prisoners on those boats. My direct ancestors landed in Boston, where they escaped, hid for years, and slowly made their way back to New Brunswick. During those very dark days, at the end of the 18th century, the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqey First Nations were instrumental in helping the Acadians survive as a people. In fact, the Acadians are the only Canadian group to openly acknowledge that they would not have survived without their friendships with First Nations people (Raul, 2008).

It is a sad and horrible story. But it is also a story about courage, strength, and hope. It is my story and the consequences of that story are rooted in the collective memory of Acadians, even today (Forgues, 2011; Thériault, 1995). I have gone back often to my own story when reading about Indigenous epistemology and research on decolonization. If I have the privilege of being a researcher today, I must never forget the power of oppression and the impact of power. In a researcher-participant relationship, power relations are always present. Throughout this study I constantly reminded myself to *tread*

softly because I tread on dreams (Yeats, 1899). My story and the First Nations people's stories are intertwined. I was able to bring that sensitivity to my research. Even so, I fully recognize the limits of my own worldviews and carefully offer findings that are interpreted through my lens. It is up to First Nations leaders and communities and Settler readers to decide what to do with these findings.

1.8 Lens for this Research

I leaned on Bourdieu's (1984, 1994) social reproduction theory to do my research, as it offers a widely accepted theory about how social patterns are reproduced. Understanding how these patterns are reproduced can be a stepping-stone to breaking the patterns.

In this study, I explored teacher expectations in three elementary classes in band-operated schools. In the schools where I conducted classroom observations, I also looked at parent-teacher, child-teacher, and child-parent relationships through the lens of expectations. Interviews, observations, and document analysis were the tools of this exploration. I also looked at how these institutions' policies and other initiatives shaped expectations of Indigenous students for the teachers who teach them. Ultimately, the goal of this study was to discover how teachers can uphold high expectations for each First Nations student, how institutions might influence those expectations, and how different societal structures and relationships contribute to creating a more complete vision for the achievement of each student.

This discussion of expectations leads to the power of institutional structures and societal beliefs as well as the power of the perceptions that help shape adult expectations of First

Nations students. To better understand the family and the child's beliefs, values, and skills, as well as the institutional organizations that influenced teacher expectations, I looked at expectations through the lens of cultural capital. The theoretical framework that drives cultural capital, and this research, is Bourdieu's social reproduction theory, which I explain in Chapter 2.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

2.1 Social Reproduction Theory

Social reproduction theory articulates the structures, practices, resources, and activities that perpetuate social inequality from one generation to the next. It is rooted in the questions of how and why relationships of social inequality are reproduced from parents to children. There is more than one theory that attempts to explain social reproduction (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1979; Willis, 1997). Of all the different theories related to social reproduction, Pierre Bourdieu's work leads the field of research when it comes to the sociology of education.

2.1.1 Social reproduction and inequality.

Bourdieu (1984) explained social inequality from a capital perspective. He went beyond school structures and into home life to observe how individuals of different social backgrounds are raised and socialized differently. The home context socialization offers children—and, later on, adults—a sense of what is expected and comfortable (*habitus*). These early experiences outline the nature and the quantity of resources that an individual has (cultural, social, and economic *capital*). All through life, when individuals negotiate or interact with different institutional structures (*fields*), such as schools, they draw upon their cultural, social, and economic capital. Bourdieu argued that there is a pattern of inequality embedded in any social structure and that some social practices are more valued than others. He stated that an individual's social position is not merely the result of hard work, intelligence or talent, but rather the result of the individual's cultural,

social, and economic capital. Bourdieu argued that cultural capital is developed during early childhood within a family setting. Middle-class parents transfer linguistic competencies, attitudes, and skills that are aligned with the cultural capital necessary for school success. According to social reproduction theory, parents from a low socioeconomic status (SES) context do not transfer to their children the cultural capital that is associated with school success.

Bourdieu (1973) also argued that different social classes and inequality still abound because inequality between different social classes is a concept that remains unquestioned. It is a process that is established and accepted. Research can help us understand exactly how and why social inequality is reproduced. We can denaturalize this process by adjusting social structures (e.g., schools), institutional organizations (e.g., language used at parent-teacher meetings, different cultural approaches integrated into teaching practices), and applying policies to offer each child equitable school advantages, which includes fostering high teacher expectations for each learner.

I found it helpful to cross-reference research on social reproduction theory and teacher expectations to understand how teachers' expectations of Indigenous children can be rooted in social reproduction patterns, to the disadvantage of some students. It can be difficult for teachers to uphold high expectations for each learner when the context of the school—and society itself—provides an advantage to the forms of cultural, economic, and social capital practiced by middle-class families of the dominant culture. In general, my research on cultural capital has shown that teachers have had no access to specific professional development to address cultural capital inequality. They are not aware of

how certain forms of cultural capital are embedded in policies, teaching practices, and curricula. Before presenting my findings and the proposed conceptual framework, it is essential to understand social reproduction and cultural capital theories.

2.1.2 Social reproduction and institutions.

Social reproduction theory is a widely accepted theory that describes how social patterns of inequity are reproduced. It is important to know how this theory has underpinned other research regarding child-rearing practices and school success, and how these social patterns have contributed to shaping expectations of student success.

Education should not be an agent of conformation to the middle-class ideal, but rather an agent of transformation (Freire, 1970). Too often, middle-class people, who have middle-class values and attitudes, write policies that will help the underprivileged or non-Western children fit better within a school structure based on middle-class cultural capital instead of questioning whether the Western structure is the best system for all children (Gillies, 2005). This tendency hinders the possibilities for education to become an agent of transformation.

The goal of my research was to better understand how the cultural capital that First Nations parents and caregivers transfer to their children is understood by teachers, and how this understanding shapes their expectations of children's achievement. In parallel, I wanted to learn how the structure and policies of institutional organizations—in this case band-operated schools—shape teachers' expectations of First Nations students. The findings and discussion of this study lead to strategies that will contribute to schools

becoming more inclusive of all families, regardless of the cultural capital they transfer to their children. This study also contributes toward culturally proficient teacher learning and equitable pedagogies as well as policies and institutional organizations that foster high expectations for each learner.

Breaking through inequalities and breaking cycles should not be about imposing one point of view with almost a “missionary zeal” (Gillies, 2005). History has proven again and again that “ultimate truths” can only lead to destroying peoples’ identities, bringing new sorrows such as cycles of violence and substance use problems. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report (2015) clearly stated that the goal of residential schooling was to impose a Western point of view and to assimilate, with a missionary zeal. Residential schooling has been described as cultural genocide. Children, families, and communities felt the consequences of this educational violence in the earliest days of this colonial initiative and they still live with the repercussions. While my research did not focus on the residential schools, I cannot ignore the fact that these schools—as well as assimilation measures such as laws that prohibited “Indians” from leaving their reserve without official permission and laws that prohibited them from practicing their cultural ceremonies—have had an impact on the cultural capital that First Nations parents transfer to their children today. All the elders, along with most of the teachers, education leaders, parents, and caregivers I interviewed talked about the impact of residential schools. For this reason, even though it was not the goal of the research, I have included the residential schools legacy in the findings as a way of honouring the

words of people I interviewed and to bring in that worldview within the research frameworks on expectations and cultural capital.

The lens of cultural capital embedded in a social reproduction framework uses social class and socioeconomic status (SES) to see how different families operate. This helps me move away from one “ultimate truth” and toward understanding expectations and different family cultures in more detail than was the case in previous expectations and education research. I present a body of research concerning child-rearing practices and parental actions and attitudes vis-à-vis school success. Although these studies do not necessarily define these practices as cultural capital, they do describe relationships between parental actions and attitudes and school success. Finally, I explore studies that highlight connections between ethnicity, cultural capital, and parental practices. This thorough understanding of research regarding cultural capital, parental practices, and school success was necessary in order to structure findings in a solid and useful conceptual framework.

2.2 Cultural Capital

There exists a large body of literature examining parenting through the lens of child-rearing logic. Lareau (1987; 2000; 2003; 2011) led this work based on Bourdieu’s social reproduction framework and cultural capital theory. Through an American ethnographic study, Lareau developed a topology of cultural capital that attempts to explain the child-rearing logic most likely to be adopted by middle-class parents and the child-rearing logic most likely to be adopted by low SES parents. She observed twelve families: six White,

five Black, and one interracial. In this study, I have found that the child-rearing logic that Lareau uses cannot always be applied to First Nations families in relation to SES.

However, it provides a foundation to build upon. When the school culture is not aligned with the family culture, children do not achieve as well. This study provides a conceptual framework to better understand how the cultures are not aligned and how education leaders and teachers can make a difference. Prior to this research, no study has explored what Lareau theorized as concerted cultivation and natural growth in a New Brunswick First Nations context.

2.2.1 Concerted cultivation and natural growth.

Lareau (1987) explained cultural capital as the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that parents (or primary caregivers) transfer to their children. She proposed the concept of *concerted cultivation* as opposed to the paradigm of *natural growth* to describe the active and purposeful implementation of strategic child-rearing practices that are thought to offer children an advantage in school and social settings. Middle-class families tend to practice concerted cultivation, according to Lareau (1987). These practices include actively fostering cognitive and social skills, teaching children how to interact in a structured environment, and modeling how to negotiate for better and fair treatment.

Lareau theorized that in working-class and underprivileged families, parents set clearer boundaries between adults and children, using directives instead of negotiating or reasoning. There are fewer organized leisure activities and more extensive interaction with kin (extended families) in these families. Lareau (2003) argued that social class can

predict the different philosophies and approaches to child-rearing more accurately than either race or gender.

Lareau (2003) stressed that whether they practice concerted cultivation or natural growth, all parents want their children to be happy and to thrive. But different child-rearing practices transmit different advantages to children. Professionals (e.g., doctors and teachers) who work with children agree on the broad principles fostering educational development in children and these principles become standards. In turn, these standards guide, normalize, and perpetuate middle-class parental practices. Currently, these standards include talking with children, developing their talents and interests through organized activities, and being actively involved in literacy development and school-based learning. Social institutions (e.g., schools and health clinics) reinforce the importance of parental practices aligned with expected standards by rewarding the knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that stem from them. Middle-class parents comply with these principles of child-rearing by engaging in concerted cultivation. Parents who practice concerted cultivation are more involved with education (Lareau, 2003; 2011).

From early childhood, children of concerted cultivation environments learn cultural codes, skills, values, attitudes, and linguistic techniques that foster school success (Cheadle, 2008; Cheadle & Amato, 2010; Henderson, 2013; Lareau, 2011; Lareau & Weininger, 2003; Sullivan, 2001). Low SES parents are committed to providing food, shelter, love, and other basic support but, given economic challenges, do not actively cultivate the development of cognitive and social skills in a way that matches the middle-

class values of schools. Lareau (2003) stated that both types of child-rearing approaches are valuable when it comes to raising children, but children of parents who practice concerted cultivation develop a stronger sense of comfort in school, and, later on, in middle-class society. School systems, as well as other institutions, reward the behaviours adopted by children of concerted cultivation (Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2003).

Concerted cultivation and natural growth are one way to categorize the cultural capital that children bring to school. It is therefore important to understand Lareau’s leading research on cultural capital and school success. Table 1 shows how her research has led to classification of parental practices by social class.

Table 1. *Typology of Differences in Child-rearing*

(Lareau, 2003, p. 31)

	Child-rearing approach	
	Concerted Cultivation	Natural Growth
Key Elements	Parent actively fosters and assesses child’s talents, opinions, and skills	Parent cares for child and allows child to grow
Organization of Daily Life	Multiple child leisure activities orchestrated by adults	Child “hangs out,” particularly with kin
Language Use	Reasoning/directives; Child contests adult statements; Extended negotiations between parents and child; Language is tool to be developed and a tool that opens doors	Directives; Child rarely questions or challenges adults; Child generally accepts directives; Language is a practical tool

Interventions in Institutions	Parents criticize and intervene on behalf of child; Child is trained to take on this role	Dependence on institutions; Sense of powerlessness and frustration; Conflict between child-rearing practices at home and at school
From childhood to adulthood	Children are more tired and anxious, but find a better place in society as middle-class adults	Children are more carefree and closer to their siblings, but are more stressed as young adults, facing the same challenges as their parents
Consequences	Emerging sense of entitlement on the part of the child	Emerging sense of constraint on the part of the child

From this table, we can deduce that children of parents who practice concerted cultivation develop skills and attitudes aligned with schools, making it easier for them to feel comfortable in a school environment. Presently, school environments are aligned with middle-class knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes.

2.2.2 Limits and criticisms of concerted cultivation and natural growth.

There are limits and criticisms regarding the concepts of concerted cultivation and natural growth. Cultural capital is difficult to measure, as there is no agreement on ways to measure it (e.g., Kingston, 2001; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). There is also disagreement about the role of race or ethnicity. While Cheadle (2008) agreed with Lareau that there is a relationship between concerted cultivation and school success, his findings challenged Lareau’s findings that race does not matter. He found that racial differences are still present, even after controlling for SES. Dumais, Kessinger, and Ghosh (2012) supported Cheadle’s findings. They found that race does matter, even when parents are middle-

class. They explain this race effect by critiquing Lareau's small sample of families within specific geographical areas. Goldenberg (2014) stated that beyond cultural capital research to explain disparities between student achievement, teachers must understand the cultural capital that students bring to school in order to create culturally appropriate learning environments that foster school success for each child. In other words, cultural capital research needs to include an understanding of ethnicities.

Another limit of cultural capital is the definition of parental involvement. According to Lareau (2003), parental involvement is mainly a parent action. But parental involvement is a concept that can have more than one starting point. The construction of a "good parent" as a participating parent, where participation is often defined in particular and limiting ways, contributes to parental guilt. Moss (2009) argued that parents are always participating in their children's lives to the best of their ability as they raise and provide for them. Participation should be an "identifying feature of the institution rather than a quality of a good parent" (Moss, 2009, p. 46). This shift in thinking provides a productive way to move beyond blaming discourses and towards influencing high expectations for each child. Miller, Hilgendorf, and Dilworth-Bart (2014) also stated that while parent-school connections are influenced by cultural capital, early childhood centres and schools can do a lot to foster positive school connectedness. It is also important to understand who has a "parental role" when it comes to formal academic education. One young Indigenous middle-class mother said to me, "Oh their grandmother does their homework after school. I never open their book bag." The family-school connectedness need not always be with the parents, as it is with dominant middle-class families, but with the

family member who takes care of the child's schooling most of the time. I kept these notions in mind during my analysis and reflections because they allowed me to look at the data both through a cultural capital lens and through the lenses of power and of Indigenous cultural practices.

2.2.3 Culture of power.

Delpit (2006) showed a similar finding to Lareau (2003), namely that when children's cultural capital is aligned with the school's culture, they achieve better, although Delpit does not use the words *cultural capital*. She talks instead of a *culture of power*, where middle-class people of the dominant group have *codes* for participating in power. She says these codes are at the core of the different cultural capital that parents transfer to their children and are the reason middle-class children tend to be more successful at school. Her description of these codes aligns with Lareau's findings. However, Delpit (2006; 2012) showed that ethnicity does matter when one's group is not part of the dominant group, even if within the middle class. For example, Delpit (2006; 2012) explained that middle-class parents offer choices to their children whereas vulnerable (i.e., low SES) families or parents of Black children or other non-White dominant cultures will give directives to children. Because most teachers belong to White middle-class society, they give choices to children. For example, they might say, "Is this how we ask our friends to share their blocks?" when a child is pulling on another child's blocks. But this code or way of formulating demands (and it is a demand, just laced with the appearance of giving the child a choice) can lead to behaviour problems when children do not understand the codes that teachers are using and do not react appropriately. When not

familiar with this type of choice-demand, children might believe that teacher is actually giving them a choice and reply, “yes.” It is in fact one way of getting the blocks. It may not be the most appropriate way and it may not be what is being taught at home, but the inability to understand the teacher’s language code might lead a child to think that teacher is asking a genuine question, not making a demand.

Delpit’s analysis echoes Lareau’s findings regarding the use of language between the middle-class families and the vulnerable families. Children of middle-class families who understand language as a negotiation tool and who know its codes do better at school and their parents are better at negotiating on behalf of their children. Without awareness of the different usage of language, teachers can unintentionally contribute to inequitable social reproduction patterns. I believe most teachers want what is best for their students and would therefore be interested in teaching approaches that contribute to breaking these social reproduction patterns.

Delpit also stated that people who hold power—the middle class, including teachers—are not aware that they have this power. They believe that all people think or should think like them, as they are not aware of the sense of entitlement into which they were born. Therefore, they do not hear what parents in vulnerable situations—whether it is because of a lower SES or belonging to a different culture—say when they try to negotiate on behalf of their child. She called this the “silenced dialogue” (Delpit, 1988; 2006), because at the end of such a conversation, the middle-class adults (for the purpose of this research, teachers or principals) feel that they have listened, while the vulnerable parent simply stopped speaking because they are frustrated and feel that they were not heard.

Lareau (2003) also described the success of middle-class parents when negotiating with institutions and the frustrations of vulnerable parents when they feel oppressed and not heard by the people in the institutions.

Battiste (2017) talked about how the dominant group holds the power to decide whose knowledge and whose ways of teaching will be included in curricula and pedagogies. She stated that all cultures have knowledge and values that are transferred from one generation to the next, but that one cultural group “controls the meanings and diffusion of knowledge exercises power and privilege over other groups” (p. 96). She stated that “Whiteness” is woven so tightly in the education system that it is not questioned, or only questioned through the lens of the “perceived different other” (p. 106). Like Delpit, Battiste did not distinguish between middle-class or low SES Indigenous families’ child-rearing practices, but focused on how the education system normalizes the dominant White group’s knowledges, ways of doing, and ways of being. Whereas Lareau talked about skills, values, and attitudes, Battiste talked of ways of doing and ways of being. Ultimately, they are talking about the same thing: the cultural capital that parents or caregivers transfer to their children. Other scholars, such as Kinloch and Metge (2014), have discussed how different cultural groups do not always understand each other even if they share the same language. Despite good intentions, people misread words and actions, leading them to judge others as rude, odd, or not understanding.

While they do not all use the same terms, Lareau, Delpit, and Battiste share the idea that patterns of social behaviour are reproduced from one generation to the next, and that the middle-class dominant culture is the one with the power to make up the rules. Where

their theory differs is that Lareau claimed that concerted cultivation behaviours practiced by middle-class parents of all cultures have the same successful school results. Lareau and Weininger (2003) recognized that the history of racism and discrimination may “make it difficult for some African-American parents to comply with educators’ standards of appropriate parent-school relationships” (p. 586). They went on to say that in some schools, educators may see the parents who express concerns regarding racism in the school as difficult parents. Nevertheless, they say that cultural capital, as defined in Bourdieu’s social reproduction theory, means that formally- and informally-recognized skills, values, knowledge, and attitudes that are recognized and shaped by the middle class become the norms. Middle-class families who adhere to these norms, regardless of culture, are more successful, including at school. Delpit and Battiste disagreed, saying that concerted cultivation (or the culture of power) works only—or works better—for middle-class White families, as other cultures have different child-rearing practices even if they are part of the middle class. After much reading and reflecting, and after analyzing my own data, I agree with Delpit and Battiste. Indigenous culture is different from the dominant Western culture when it comes to child-rearing practices. My findings highlight that even middle-class Indigenous parents did not always practice concerted cultivation. Instead, they often expressed a tension between their culture, their history, and the dominant culture to the point that it created barriers to successfully aligning or even wanting to align themselves with cultural capital practices that yield more societal advantages.

Both Lareau and Delpit were adamant in saying that one form of cultural capital is not better than the other. Without naming it cultural capital, Battiste (2017) also promoted the benefits of Indigenous traditional, skills, attitudes, and cultural family values. Simply put, these researchers recognized that families love their children and want them to thrive. During my interviews I observed the same thing: families love their children and want them to thrive. Because of the way society is organized, with policies and teacher training that are aligned with middle-class practices, to foster school success presently involves adopting behaviours and meeting expectations of the dominant culture. Some researchers have offered ways to go beyond the current situation. Delpit spoke of teaching the linguistic codes explicitly so that each child can understand them and become a successful learner. She insisted on the fact that the children's culture must also be valued at school. This is important in a First Nations context, as the home and school culture can be quite different. Battiste (2017) stated that integrating Indigenous knowledge and ways of teaching will not only contribute to eliminating the education gap, but will lead to solving contemporary issues, as these knowledges are anchored in relationships and a unique understanding of the world. Lareau did not speak of integrating children's home culture at school. For my study I followed Delpit's and Battiste's path while leaning on Lareau's cultural capital theory to analyze my data. When addressing educational issues regarding First Nations, we have to advocate for an infusion of cultural referents and worldviews throughout curricula and in teaching approaches. Presently, in order to be successful, Indigenous students are subjected to assimilation, compromising their mother tongue and identities (Battiste, 2017). Yet, the calls for actions by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) insist upon learning environments that

foster the development of cultural identity while fostering school success for Indigenous students.

2.2.4 Reflecting on cultural capital and the culture of power.

Finding a balance between teaching in a dominant cultural system while respecting the values of a vulnerable or culturally different group is complex. All parents—including First Nations parents and caregivers—want their children to thrive, succeed, and learn at school. This I have heard many times both when working in First Nations communities and when conducting this study. First Nations parents and caregivers want their children to be able to participate in society. They acknowledge that this happens with a good education. At the same time, they want their children to develop a strong sense of who they are, of their cultural identity. Delpit (2006) found similar outcomes with another cultural group—African Americans. She found that African-American parents were frustrated because they felt that their children had not been taught how to participate successfully in society and how to have the same choices as children of the dominant group. Even if they had a degree or diploma, they were not taught how to fit in and speak in a way that allowed White people to understand their messages. These parents did not want their children to *become* White middle-class people, but they wanted them to be able to understand that world and be understood by that world while keeping their own culture. Battiste (2013) insisted that Indigenous students can be successful and that schools can be a site of change, a place that is liberating and where decolonizing happens, while ensuring Indigenous students are successful. As I read Delpit and Battiste, these

points seemed like an echo of what I had heard from many First Nations parents, caregivers, and leaders.

2.2.5 Cultural capital and school success.

As I showed in the previous section, while all researchers agree that children are generally more successful when the family's cultural capital is aligned with the school's culture, not all researchers agree that social class is the most important factor when it comes to predicting which family's cultural capital will be aligned with the school.

However, sufficient research has been done to show that low SES families of the dominant group are generally not as successful at school because their cultural capital is not aligned with the school's culture (Bodovski, 2010; Gillies, 2005; Lareau, 2003).

Additionally, there are examples where ethnicity matters more than social class when it comes to school success.

Delpit (2006) said that teaching linguistic codes explicitly, while also celebrating and respecting the family's linguistic codes, improves the learning of children from cultures that are not aligned with the "power culture." For example, a teacher who says, "Is this where we put the crayons?" to a child might not get the result she wanted if this child is used to instructions such as "Please put the crayons on the shelf." Delpit stated that understanding students' culture helps teachers make better pedagogical decisions. For example, she talks about a Native Alaskan culture where a storyteller is expected to add to a story when telling a familiar story to family members. Children in this culture always added details to the retelling of a story in school. Until the teacher understood that it was a cultural behaviour, she would send them to the resource teacher, thinking they had

learning difficulties. Milne (2017) found that cultural capital is mobile and that some Indigenous families, mostly middle-class, can and do learn to align their parental practices with the school's expectations regarding parental involvement. But she also stated that if more parents are to become involved, schools need to do more to align school culture with Indigenous culture as opposed to trying to teach parents to align their practices with the school's. Battiste (2017) insisted that stakeholders must reject a system where success is partially dependent on class, gender, or race. If each Indigenous child is to succeed at school, the school system needs to adjust to the culture rather than always asking parents to adjust to the school culture. Educators need to understand the cultural capital that Indigenous parents and caregivers pass on to their children.

Métis poet Marilyn Dumont (1996) wrote about cultural capital differences. She remembered her first day at school and how alone she felt because the other children seemed to know what to do and what to say, as if the teacher was their friend. This is a very powerful statement of how cultural capital can make a difference even on that very first day of school, a difference that stays throughout the schooling career if educators and policies are not more inclusive of each child's home experience.

These examples demonstrate that cultural capital is not dependent on social class alone. I looked at cultural capital from the points of view of both ethnicity and social class. My findings show that ethnicity does matter.

2.3 Cultural Capital and Parental Involvement

Across different cultures, parental involvement is important when it comes to children's success. In a meta-analysis, Jeynes (2012; 2005) found the impact of parental involvement on school success was significant for all minority groups. Fan and Chen (2001), in another meta-analysis, found that parental involvement was positively correlated with success and that parental expectations were at the forefront of parental involvement. Hattie (2009) stated that parental expectations, above any other form of parental involvement, have a strong impact on children's achievement. He also stipulated that when parents do not know the language of the school, it "can be a major barrier to the home contributing to achievement" (p. 71). These findings are consistent with concerted cultivation research.

Within the cultural capital concept, concerted cultivation parental behaviours are framed as parental involvement and expectations, which lead to school success. However, strong family and school relationships require respect of and from the community, which includes working to create a strong sense of community within the school, especially in communities where trust in the school is slow (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). My findings show that it is difficult for some parents—even middle-class parents—to trust the school. This mistrust often leads to non-involvement with the school for some middle-class parents. My findings contradict studies about concerted cultivation parental practices, where middle-class parents nurture strong relationships with school and align their practices to meet the school's expectations and standards. My findings also show that

even middle-class parents often do not understand the school language and are frustrated by this situation. This is another contradiction of cultural capital theory.

Parents who practice concerted cultivation tend to respond to their child's talents, strengths, and opinions. Discipline strategies are rooted in reasoning. In concerted cultivation philosophy, we do not know specifically whether or not rules are applied, but we do know that activities are orchestrated. The development of language as a negotiating tool that opens doors is an important part of concerted cultivation framework (Lareau, 2003; 2011). We can deduce that parents who teach their children negotiating techniques and actively develop their talents have high expectations for school success and behaviour. These parents want to empower their children by teaching them how to solve problems and become independent. Parents do this by being engaged, by encouraging children to have opinions, and by responding to children's talents and skills. It is important to note that these parental practices work regarding school success because the school's expectations are aligned with these behaviours. These parental practices are part of the culture of middle-class parents. Lower SES parents can also become engaged parents when expectations are clear and respectful of their own situations. Siraj-Blatchford (2010) found that parents "tend to make the extra efforts required in developing a rich home learning environment when they believe their efforts will be rewarded. When parents are aware that their child has as much potential as any other to be successful, and when they recognise that they have an active role to play themselves in realising this potential, then early social disadvantages may be overcome" (p. 476). Supporting low SES parents or parents from a culture that is different from the dominant

group as their children walk successfully on the school pathway is an achievable goal, but school leaders and teachers need to better understand how to do this. In parallel, the system itself needs to allow itself to be shaped by the community's standards and expectations rather than following the dominant group's expectations and standards.

This point takes us back to teacher expectations and how those expectations guide their pedagogical actions, including how they communicate and relate with parents and families. Recognizing different ways of parenting and valuing the parent and caregiver roles as always participatory can be a first step to engaging parents and caregivers. In the next section I address parental involvement in literacy, an important aspect of school success.

2.4 Cultural Capital and Literacy

Literacy habits and parental involvement are the two aspects of cultural capital that matter the most—across ethnic borders—when it comes to school success. (Bodovski, 2010; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010; Gaddis, 2013). Literacy is understood as the “capacity to understand, interpret, evaluate and use properly information found in various situations and various messages, written or oral, to communicate and interact effectively in society” (Ministère de l'Éducation et du Développement de la Petite Enfance, 2015, p. 11, loose translation). New Brunswick's comprehensive Literacy Strategy adds details to that definition: “Literacy encompasses the many ways that individuals engage with oral and written languages (alone or with others) in various printed or digital forms. It is the ability to use and access knowledge from a range of texts (oral, visual, multimedia, print and non-print) to make informed decisions in a variety of contexts; for instance,

technological, financial, civic, food, social, and health. It includes an individual's capacity to interact effectively in all economic and social situations required to be successful in today's (and tomorrow's) society" (Province of New Brunswick, 2017, p. 4).

There are other definitions of literacy, as it is a complex concept. I have chosen the above definitions because they include using and understanding language in various forms and in different contexts. I have also focused on those definitions because they are the ones that inform the curricula teachers in band-operated schools are currently using to teach First Nations students. It is important to highlight that these definitions include oral communication, an important part of Indigenous culture (Battiste, 2011). Studies have shown that oral communication at school is important when it comes to reading and writing success (Flynn, 2007; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014; Lems et al., 2009; Ouellette & Beers, 2010).

In a cultural capital framework, it was important for me to look at the literacy habits of students and of parents with their children at home. Parents who practice concerted cultivation generally actively foster their child's cognitive development. In cultural capital theory this includes reading to their children. This parental practice can contribute to the child's success when it comes to literacy (Davis-Kean, 2005; Dionne, 2007; Ewart et de Rocquinigny, 2001) regardless of ethnicity or SES (Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2012).

Other researchers have looked at literacy and different ethnic groups from a teaching angle. Cummins et al. (2005) found that when children are not part of society's dominant

group, they do better in literacy when they are able to “invest their identity in the learning process” (p. 8). Cummins (2011) advocated that policies take into account cultural identity if achievement is to improve for students who are not part of the dominant group. He said no research had proven that policies that typically leave out the identity component are effective when it comes to closing the achievement gap. There are examples of how this can be done. Taylor and Cummins (2011) talked about cultivating writing so that children produce identity texts, both in English (the language of instruction) and their native language. Identity texts foster recognition and acceptance for children, increasing their engagement and achievement (Cummins, 2011; Talyor, 2011). They are called identity texts not because they speak about identity but because they put the child’s identity alongside the “identity” of curricula. Identity texts, which can be written, oral, musical, visual, or a combination of these, give students a sense that they can create representations of who they are in a school (Taylor & Cummins, 2011). This is pertinent information for this research as these authors go on to say that it is especially important for Indigenous students because their parents or grandparents lived at a time when language was forbidden and Indigenous culture was represented in a negative way at school and in society. Identity texts allow students to experience their culture at school, an important element of increasing student success (Battiste, 2017; Trudgett, Page, Bodkin-Andrews, Franklin, & Whittaker, 2017).

As my main objective in this research was to contribute to the conversation regarding the closing of the achievement gap, it was essential to look at literacy habits. Specifically, I looked at reading to one’s child and the expectations parents hold when it comes to their

child's literacy skills. I also wanted to observe how literacy is taught at school to have a more complete story on literacy in First Nations schools and to look at literacy from different angles. Before explaining in greater detail the meaning of *expectations*, it is necessary to differentiate cultural capital from culture and identity.

2.5 Cultural Capital, Culture, and Identity

Culture is understood to be the values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour that a group of people share. These elements can change over time as new patterns of behaviour and evolving values can influence beliefs. Patterns of behaviour include artistic and heritage expression, ways of understanding the world, political and economic ideologies and actions, spiritual expressions, social organization, and traditional practices, to name a few (Smircich, 1983; Smith et al., 2013; Statistics Canada, 2011). This definition is similar to the definition of cultural capital: Attitudes, values, knowledge and skills, most often transferred from parent to child (Lareau, 2003). For example, *knowledge*—ways of understanding the world—and *values* are both part of the definition of culture and cultural capital. Likewise, the skills that parents transfer to their children are influenced by heritage expressions, traditional practices, and social organization. Parents want their children to thrive in the world as they understand it. Parents who practice concerted cultivation transfer the skill of using language as a negotiation tool because they understand the necessity of using language to open doors. In contrast, parents who practice natural growth transfer the skill of direct language, because they understand language as a direct communication tool with no room for misunderstandings. All these parents love their children and transfer the cultural capital that they feel is important.

However, Lareau and Weininger (2003) specified that not all elements of cultural capital matter and there is a relative “monopoly over cultural skills and competences that can yield profits” (p. 598). While Lareau (2003; 2011) was adamant that cultural capital is transferred according to social class, other researchers believed that ethnicity matters more than social class when it comes to transferring cultural capital (Battiste, 2017, Delpit, 2012). What is certain is that while cultural capital is composed of some of a culture’s attributes, not all cultural attributes are considered cultural capital. In order for an element of culture to become cultural capital it has to be in demand (usually as established by middle-class people of the dominant culture) and has to be seen to “yield a return” (Dougherty 2003, as cited in Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 602). Presently in education, the elements of cultural capital that are seen as beneficial for society at large, including in Indigenous communities, are mostly determined by the dominant class, as evidenced by the way band-operated schools in New Brunswick adhere to the provincial curricula and teacher education is framed by a Western model. For instance, all three elders who participated in this study stated that one’s relationship to nature and to land is embedded in Indigenous culture, but this relationship is not presently considered to be cultural capital in a band-operated school. This element of Indigenous culture has not historically been part of teacher education or integrated into curricula. In other words, developing a child’s relationship to nature and to land is not part of the schools’ expectations or standards—at least not the schools that participated in this study—even if it is part of Indigenous identity.

Identity is a complex social construct. Many researchers have written on the subject (Cormier, 2005; Howard, 2000; Landry et al., 2005). I have chosen a definition that seemed to be most aligned with the participants' perception of "identity." In this study, identity is understood to be the human need to make sense of who one is, within one's community's practices and societal context, and also within an ever-changing world (Howard, 2000). In some cases, one's identity is aligned with the cultural capital that is expected in social institutions, such as school, making it easier for many children who carry such an identity to succeed. In a First Nations context, the Indigenous identity is not aligned with the school system structure. This study shows that Indigenous identity, as described by participants, is rooted in language, in land, in relationships and in community. The school system is structured around standards, curricula, and individual success. Moreover, residential schools and colonization have generated a sense of loss of identity; many Indigenous people feel a need to deny their identity (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), leaving communities divided over ideologies and over cultural, political, or economic issues (St. Denis, 2007). Yet, "[t]he loss of identity cast children into a state of confusion over what was right and good in their lives" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 105). Not only is the Indigenous identity not an integrated part of expectations and standards of the school system, it is also not present in a theory that looks at social class only.

While cultural capital theory looks at social class differences regarding child-rearing practices, it does not consider cultural identity as also having an impact when it comes to school success. A body of research disagrees and has found that culture does matter when

it comes to school success, that culture needs to be integrated to teaching practices, and that this leads not only to developing a strong cultural identity, but also to stronger academic success (Ball, 2004; Battiste, 2017; Kanu, 2007; Munns et al., 2013; Trudgett et al., 2017).

There are concrete examples where cultural groups have successfully added their culture as a component of formal education, making it a driver for success. This strategy has proven to be very effective for the francophone communities in New Brunswick, as they now have a provincial policy—*The linguistic and cultural policy: A societal project for the Francophone education system* (2014)—that orchestrates all francophone institutions in a forward, collaborative movement together and has proven more open to parents and community. New Brunswick francophone students' math results in the 2015 PISA assessments (Poitras, 2017) were the most improved in the country. In 2015 and in 2016 Grade 2 literacy scores were close to targeted results (Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2016). In the past, the students in the francophone sector were often far behind target. While more research is needed to determine exactly what led to this success, a policy that integrates culture and academics into schooling and that is understood by all stakeholders can only be beneficial when it comes to aligning skills, values, and attitudes between parents, communities, and schools.

A school having its own academic and cultural purpose of education has also proven to be effective in Toronto, where the school board established two Africentric Alternative Schools. These schools offer African-centred education and have succeeded in their goals of meeting the specific needs of the Black student population, reducing drop-out rates,

and increasing achievement (MacDonald, 2010; Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2015). In both these examples, communities, parents, and education leaders came together to define education in terms of academic and cultural concepts that work best for their children. This included parental and community involvement, which is an element of cultural capital that works across ethnicity and that these communities shaped according to their needs. In addition to these examples, there is a body of literature regarding the importance of student and family cultures for a school serving a particular community when it comes to school success and community thriving (Battiste, 2000; Landry et al., 2005; Pilote, 2003; St Denis, 2011). Culturally responsive teaching has been identified as a powerful tool to close the achievement gap when the school culture is different than the child's home culture (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Hammond (2015) described culturally responsive teaching as

an educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning (p. 15).

Culturally responsive teaching provides a different angle for examining factors that contribute to school success. Where cultural capital theory focuses on the success of parental practices and school culture from the dominant group perspective, culturally responsive teaching theory offers alternatives that go beyond encouraging parents to adopt dominant group practices (Chaos, 1994; Freire, 1970; Gillies, 2005).

2.6 Reflections on Cultural Capital

In a Western context, there are lessons to learn from cultural capital studies about how child-rearing practices impact school success. However, many other studies have concluded that this framework cannot be applied across different cultural contexts. Two components of child-rearing practices stand out regardless of cultural landscape: parental involvement and parental expectations. But whose definition of parental involvement and expectations counts? While parental involvement and parental expectations generally translate into a concerted cultivation model in Western society, this is not necessarily the case in a different cultural context, my findings show. Going back to Lareau's (2003) definition of cultural capital—the transmission of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes from parents to child—parental involvement and parental expectations could be the underlying elements that drive the choices of which skills, values, and attitudes to transmit. In other words, scheduled activities and learning language as a negotiation tool seem to be Western ways of translating expectations and involvement into concrete child-rearing practices. But these practices are not as prominent in Indigenous culture, even when parents belong to the middle class. Moreover, in a very community-oriented culture, such as First Nations, it seems to be that extended family and community involvement are also important when it comes to school success (May & Aikam, 2003; Munroe et al., 2013). In this study I demonstrate that school expectations and parental expectations in a First Nations context are not aligned, which negatively affects student success.

Understanding both cultural capital and culture was important as I was doing research in a First Nations context. Prior to this research, there was no research about the cultural capital transmitted from First Nation parents and caregivers to children in a New Brunswick context. In fact, only one other study on cultural capital and Indigenous families has been conducted in Canada, in Ontario (Milne, 2017). How do teachers perceive the cultural capital that First Nations parents transmit to their children and how does this understanding influence the expectations that teachers uphold for the children? How does the education system acknowledge different worldviews, if at all? How might schools learn the expectations of parents and of the community? These questions need to be explored in order to acknowledge cultural differences when creating policies or developing teaching approaches. One value in First Nations is to bring new knowledge home in order to help the community grow. This worldview is aligned to a society that is more community-based than focused on individualization. In turn, a community-focused worldview influences child-rearing practices. These different views on child-rearing could make some of the research on cultural capital irrelevant in a First Nations context, just as it does not apply in studies on other community-based societies such as Asia and East India (Crozier, 2009; Garg et al., 2005; Johnson, 1985; Zhong, Magee, Maddux, & Galinsky, 2006). However, it must be also acknowledged that some studies show the same findings across ethnic borders or economic status: parental expectations and parental involvement do make a difference when it comes to children's school success (Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001).

Schools and communities can influence parental expectations and parental involvement. Supporting low SES parents or parents and caregivers from another culture as their children walk the school pathway is an achievable goal. Schools and communities can make a difference when it comes to children's school success and can help children build the necessary cultural capital to succeed. Cultural capital is dynamic and the necessary cultural capital, including linguistic codes, can be taught to each child so that all children can have the skills and attitudes that will most likely foster school success (Delpit, 2012). However, a necessary part of this teaching is a valuing of the linguistic codes and cultural capital that various children and their families bring to the school.

At the same time, decision makers, policy makers, schools, and communities can make a difference by having a better understanding of what parents expect for their children and by providing resources and support for their involvement in the formal education of their children. Cultural capital should never be about offering a deficit view of low SES families or non-Western families, but rather about gathering a deeper understanding of different families in order to meet their needs.

Understanding that *cultural capital* is a Western concept based on an individualistic child-rearing philosophy that cannot be universally applied across cultures makes it easier to activate the process of conscientization (Freire, 1970). Freire explains this process as the ability to develop a critical awareness of one's social reality. Conscientization allows researchers, policy makers, educators, and decision makers to deconstruct colonial viewpoints in order to question and then adapt or adjust Western-based models to different cultures. Understanding different parental cultural contexts and taking the time

to comprehend parents' expectations for their children becomes a building block for fostering parental involvement in children's formal education, a strategy that can work across cultures. This is particularly important because too often leaders, researchers, policy makers, and decision makers have tried to see how to encourage non-achievers, whether they be from other cultures or from low SES families, by applying middle-class solutions while ignoring their specific cultural or SES context (Bodovski, 2010; Chao, 1994; Gillies, 2005). Battiste (2011) summarized this practice by stating that "this [Western] ideology seeks to change the consciousness of the oppressed, not change the situation that oppressed them" (p. 198). This Western ideology has not worked for Indigenous students. We need to find better solutions if we are serious about school success for each child.

Knowing that parental expectations and parental involvement make a difference across cultures and different SES, these parental forms of engagement might be a better starting point to eliminate the achievement gap. Trying to understand the complexity of the contextual factors that influence parental expectations and involvement might generate a more inclusive view of cultural capital, leading to different pedagogy or support mechanisms.

Child-rearing practices matter when it comes to school success. But cultural background and SES also matter. While Lareau's (2003) study concluded that class mattered more than race, other studies disagreed with that finding, though all have found that building cultural capital does help with school success. These conclusions from the literature review, along with my findings, have led me to believe that both support mechanisms for

families and changes in schools are necessary. Culturally responsive pedagogies, strategies to help parents and communities engage in their children's education, building cultural capital outside the home learning environment, and understanding different cultural viewpoints and integrating them into school practices and policies, seem to be some of the ways to give each child an equal chance at success. All of these support mechanisms begin with having high expectations for each child.

2.7 Expectations

The notion of *teacher expectations* generally refers to the deductions a teacher makes, consciously or unconsciously, in regards to student achievement. These deductions are influenced by the teacher's knowledge. The notion of expectations can therefore be seen as an element of pedagogical and personal knowledge that a teacher has, knowledge that "controls the teacher's perception, judgment, and behavior" (Kagan, cited in Mansour, 2009, p. 27). If teachers' expectations are framed by their knowledge, and if they have little knowledge regarding First Nations culture, it could mean that it is easier to make negative assumptions about parental or student behaviour through their own cultural lens. These assumptions matter because abundant research in diverse contexts has shown that teacher expectations matter when it comes to achievement. The effect of teacher expectations on student performance is well-documented (e.g., Brophy, 1983; Timperley & Phillips, 2003; Weinstein, 2002). Dusek and Joseph (1983), in a meta-analysis of 77 studies, found that a student's cumulative folder, physical attractiveness, social class, and race are the most common influences on teacher expectations.

2.7.1 Conveying expectations.

How do teachers convey high or low academic expectations? According to Ambady and Rosenthal (1992), affective tone and quality of interactions with students communicate teacher expectations. Students respond to these signals by behaving as expected in the classroom. *Affective tone* includes elements such as being friendly (e.g., smiling, playful dialogue), praising accurately for success, and non-verbal communication (e.g., nodding, leaning forward to listen to students). Indigenous educators, families, and elders in this study talked about the playful dialogue that is present in their culture. They talked about how children are often taught through non-verbal communication (e.g., taking the hand of a little one drumming off-beat to drum with him or her). These culture-specific examples are also part of affective tone. In other words, educators need to understand the culture of the community in order to understand the elements of affective tone that are aligned with their students' home culture. *Quality of interaction* includes elements such as giving time to answer questions, giving prompts to improve answers, offering detailed feedback, stating specific goals, and using effective teaching methods. Expecting children "to do their best" is considered a low expectation, as this does not convey specific goals the child needs to meet (Walkey et al., 2013). I reflect here on Delpit's (2006, 2012) assertion that vulnerable children or children from a different ethnicity (African-American or Alaskan Native) do not understand the linguistic codes that the teacher uses. What if, even with the best intentions, some students do not understand the prompts that a teacher uses to convey high expectations unless the teacher has taught them explicitly? What if playful dialogue is different from one culture to another? How would the teacher know unless she has taken the time to learn another culture?

The expectations that a teacher has for students directly influence the teacher's actions. In turn, these actions influence students' success (Shulman, 1987; Stipek, 2002; Weinstein, 2002). Lowering expectations for whatever reason actually limits students' life opportunities (Crozier, 2009; Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). This means that some behaviours teachers adopt that are meant to provide extra support for low-expectancy students can actually make it more challenging for students to learn. Compensatory behaviour (e.g., giving a lot of extra attention) is sometimes supplemented by subtle negative behaviours or expressions. Hattie (2009) said expectations need to create an environment where students "enjoy challenging learning intentions" (p. 124). By being conscious of the consequences of expectations, researchers, policy makers, educators, and decision makers can deconstruct colonial viewpoints in order to question the applicability of Western-based models to different cultures and adapt the models as necessary. Understanding different parental cultural contexts, while taking the time to comprehend parents' expectations and aspirations for their children, becomes a building block for fostering parental involvement in their child's formal education, a strategy that can work across cultures.

2.7.2 Expectations and First Nations students.

What about teachers' academic expectations when it comes to First Nations students in Canada? Does the research tell us the same story? There is very little research on teacher expectations and First Nations students. Malin (1990; 2003) speaks of the cultural differences that often marginalize Aboriginal students in a classroom and make it more difficult for them to perform to the best of their abilities. Reyna (2000) found that high-achieving Aboriginal students were more likely to receive positive reactions than high-achieving non-Aboriginal students. This suggests that teachers had low expectations of Aboriginal students. Teachers in my study explained that they were surprised when Aboriginal students achieved very well because of their adverse living conditions. Unfortunately, Indigenous students have been subjected to low expectations for many generations.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) concurred that a lot of residential school teachers, principals, and officials had low expectations of Aboriginal students. The report says that in addition to all the different forms of abuse and cultural genocide that these students had to endure, they did not even come out of residential schools with a decent education. Most students could not read past a Grade 3 level. A few could read at a Grade 6 level but still did not benefit from the same education that was delivered to non-Indigenous students. In residential schools, part of the problem was the actual time spent on instruction. Students were expected to work in the fields, the kitchen, the laundry room, etc. in order to reduce operational costs. They did not spend the same amount of time in classes as non-Indigenous students. But there is also the fact that

expectations were very low. For example, some school inspectors and teachers believed that mathematical concepts were too difficult for Indigenous students. Other low expectation comments that are recorded in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) report include: It is not wise to expect Aboriginal children to be as smart as other children; Aboriginal children have a lower mental capacity than other children; and they need to be prepared to do manual work more than they need to learn academic subjects. The result of these low expectations was that they were taught using mostly repetitive exercises, the object being to teach by using memory. Only rarely, if ever, did teachers introduce activities that required higher thinking skills. While this could also be a strategy to ensure that students did not question the residential schools and their true mission of assimilation, it still conveys low expectations to students. In turn, these low expectations resulted in teachers teaching to those low expectations. The low expectations still exist today, as my findings show. Sarra (2014) examined how the school system itself, a Western model teaching Western knowledge, leads to low expectations for Indigenous students because of the unspoken contextual message in school that Western knowledge and ways are superior to Indigenous ways. Stelmach et al. (2008) showed that Indigenous parents reported differences between knowledge they felt was important and knowledge educators and policies valued. This led to different expectations. Having low expectations and different expectations is not a strong foundation for school success.

2.7.3 Expectations and school success.

Students' academic success has been hindered when low expectation messages have been conveyed to them, whether in the distant or not-so-distant past. Although the legacy of the residential schools and oppressive Canadian laws still impact Indigenous youth today, could not all Indigenous students have the potential to succeed if their teachers believed they could? If teachers believed in their individual and collective capacity to make a difference in student achievement, rather than blaming home life, parent involvement, socio-economic status, and student motivation, then many more Indigenous students would graduate. In their study about expectations and Canadian Indigenous students, Riley and Ungerleider (2012) found that although all teachers had a desire to treat their students well, too many teachers were inclined to make educational decisions for these students based on their perception of the Indigenous students' living conditions rather than on the students' abilities, thus limiting those students' learning and occupational opportunities. Their findings also emphasized the fact that teachers are not always aware of the biases they hold or the influence their expectations have upon students. These findings lead me to ask the questions: When do teachers have the opportunity to learn to scrutinize their own values, beliefs, and assumptions collectively with their peers? How many teachers ever had professional development regarding cultural proficiency? How can teachers move beyond ethical barriers if they might not even be aware of these barriers?

In parallel with asking how teacher expectations influence Indigenous student success, we must also ask about teachers' professional development. Does teacher education

include effective practices for teaching Indigenous students? What levels of cultural and historical knowledge do teachers require to be able to effectively teach Indigenous students? Are teachers aware of the impact that their expectations have on their Indigenous students? How does the system, from universities to ministries of education to school districts, help teachers gain the knowledge and skills needed to uphold the same expectations for all learners, including Indigenous students? Although there are not many studies on Indigenous students and teacher expectations, there are studies on expectations and ethnicity of students.

2.7.4 Expectations across ethnic borders.

Delpit (2012) argued that there is no achievement gap at birth. She says that if teachers cannot recognize the potential of the children in front of them when those children are African American, they will carry on the stereotypic view that African-American children are damaged and will therefore fail. In her book *Multiplication is for White People: Raising Expectations for Other People's Children*, she stressed that these children do not develop to their full potential because of “society’s deeply ingrained bias of equating blackness with inferiority” (p. 9). The effect of this stereotyping the children and teaching a curriculum that is not culturally relevant to them impacts their success. Delpit’s recognition of teacher, curriculum, and societal bias regarding African-American students seems to be an echo of Riley and Ungerleider’s (2012) study with Canadian First Nations students. Their study also found biases regarding Indigenous students.

Studies on expectations and race are relevant to this study. Clifton et al. (1986) found that teacher expectations were strongly influenced by the ethnicity of students. After

extensive analyses of data from the US Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics, Blau (2003) concluded that "The best single indicator of children's vulnerability (in school) is the colour of their skin" (p. 203). In another study, Rubie-Davies (2007) found important differences in learning environments for the students of high-expectation, average-progress, and low-expectation teachers. Differences could be observed in both the relationships and the pedagogy. In the next section I discuss a more culturally appropriate learning environment that could generate high expectations for Indigenous students and move away from a context where ethnicity has a strong influence.

2.7.5 Learning environment expectations.

Wilson (2001) found that Indigenous students are more successful when their learning environment is a space where their relationship to their identity is recognized and accepted. She also found that a warm learning environment where teachers try to see situations from an Indigenous perspective is also more likely to foster success. Other researchers have found that students succeed when teachers create a learning environment where relationships make students feel accepted in all aspects, including their cultural identity (Trudgett & al., 2017; Sarra, 2014). Cummins and al. (2005) stated that teachers should create a learning environment where students feel they can bring their identity to the learning processes when that identity is different from mainstream identity. He said, "Schools can achieve this goal (improve student achievement) much more effectively when they take into account identity investment as a core component of learning" (p. 8).

McLoughlin and Oliver (2000) found that embedding learning activities in a cultural context—which includes local values—also leads to a learning environment that fosters success for students that are not part of the dominant culture. They argue that it is essential to understand the culture of the students, in this case Indigenous, to go past the surface of culture and be really inclusive of culture. This is the way to meet student and community needs. This view aligns with my findings. Elders in my study stated that presently, schools are willing to introduce what one called “superficial activities” such as making dream catchers or having a cultural day. But the elders are calling for deeper, more meaningful changes, such as creating learning environments where teachings are rooted in land, nature, and Indigenous knowledge and ways of being, and where their knowledge and ways are valued as much as Western knowledge and ways.

A good interpersonal environment (Cazden, 2001) includes strong relationships with children and their families that sometimes require teachers to step away from their own ways of communicating and of doing things to embrace and include the culture and the ways of communicating of the community. Relationships are important to school success (Martin & Dowson, 2009). Accepting children and families is a strong component of high-quality school and student relationships (Connell & Wellborn, 1991). In a Manitoba study, Goulet (2001) argued that too often schools are structured by years of colonization. As a result, Indigenous students learn in an environment framed by an “ethnocentric curriculum, authoritative relationships, racist attitudes and prejudicial beliefs about their inferiority or deficits” (p. 68). This is not a learning environment conducive to building the strong relationships that foster the achievement the Indigenous leaders and

communities want. Rather, it produces a low expectations environment that is culturally unsafe, where students do not feel accepted.

Cazden, (2001) stated that while parents' way of talking to their children is natural and influenced by their own culture, teachers have a responsibility to create the best learning environment for the children they are teaching, including the best physical and interpersonal environment, especially when children are from a cultural community that is different from the teachers'. Cohen et al., (2009) defined an efficient learning environment, or school climate, as one that includes values, expectations, and standards that provide social, emotional, and physical safety. Based on the words of the elders, it is clear that there is a tension between the habits of children's social group and the values and expectations of the school. As I explained in the section on cultural capital theory, when parental practices are not aligned with the school's culture, it is more difficult for children to succeed.

MacFarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, and Bateman (2007) found that Indigenous students were more academically successful in a culturally safe environment. While their research was conducted in a Māori setting, they concluded that all students could benefit from being in a culturally inclusive learning environment. They argued that if teachers have not consciously learned how to create culturally safe classrooms, teachers often believe that their way of doing things is the only way. They then believe students, families, or the community are the problem when children do not succeed. Teachers have not been trained think about culturally appropriate strategies or attitudes that could foster more successful relationships and pedagogies that lead to a culturally safe environment

(MacFarlane et al., 2007). At the centre of a culturally safe environment are relationships with students, with families and communities, and among the staff. Participants recognize that the community has a place in the school and its teachings. For example, school is a place where culturally relevant rituals take place.

Another component of a culturally safe environment is acknowledging the need to heal the harm that has been done to the relationships. In my study, this includes the residential school system that has destroyed family and community relationships. Schools need to honour those relationships in order to be part of the healing process. According to MacFarlane et al. (2007), educators can only create a culturally safe environment if they are exposed to the community culture. They need to become aware of the worldviews in said culture and acknowledge that students will not be expected to leave their cultural identity at home once they enter the school. Battiste (2007; 2017) agreed. Talking about education for Indigenous students, she stated teachers need to unlearn that Western knowledge is superior and to learn and value other ways of knowing and being. Ball (2004) also insisted that elders or knowledge keepers should teach some of the teachings themselves and that the learning environment needs to be one that values Indigenous knowledge equally with Western knowledge.

This culturally safe learning environment for Indigenous students, where they feel accepted within strong relationships, must include high expectations (Wilson, 2001). The structure of the environment must not put Indigenous students at a disadvantage when it comes to expectations.

While children's cognitive development is the same regardless of ethnicity, there is a negative impact on their school learning when the context in which they are socialized during early childhood is not aligned with school (Delpit, 2012; Lareau, 2003; Lareau, 2011; Phillips, 2001). When the learning environment is culturally adapted to Indigenous children, they learn better (Battiste, 2017; Colomb, 2012; MacFarlane et al., 2007; Trudgett et al, 2017). That learning environment also needs to be embedded in high teacher and institutional expectations, which are a driver for success.

2.7.6 Institutional expectations.

At the very beginning of this section, I noted that teacher expectations are deductions that the teacher makes. However, more recent research has shown that teacher expectations are not just in a teacher's mind; they also depend on institutional practices. Weinstein (2002) showed that practices such as putting too much weight on summative evaluations as opposed to daily performance can lead to missed opportunities to learn while conveying messages of low expectations to students. She stated that teacher expectations are also "built into the very fabric of our institutions and our society" (Weinstein, 2002, p. 290). This is an important point, especially for First Nations education, where the main institutional expectation in residential schools was to assimilate students who were assumed to have low capacities for learning (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

First Nations leaders still feel that institutions expect students to be assimilated to the dominant culture: "Financial policies and the integration of First Nations educational institute with the provincial educational institute are a clear and strong indication of a planned assimilation that is concretely applied by the federal government" (Conseil en Éducation des Premières Nations et Assemblée des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador, 2009, p. 19, free translation). Many studies show the same findings. From residential schools to today's Western school systems, the institutional structure makes it harder for First Nations students to see their First Nations knowledge and worldviews represented and to feel accepted. This makes it easier for them to feel pushed out of school. These structures perpetrate the expectation that many Indigenous students tend to

not finish school (Aikenhead, 2001; Battiste, 1998; Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Hunt, 2008; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Instead, educators should examine the ways in which school expectations and school environments are not aligned with Indigenous worldviews and expectations.

Being aware of how the system itself shapes expectations is important, as teachers frame their expectations of students not only from their own pedagogical and personal knowledge, but also within the demands of the system. Rubie-Davies (2014) and Weinstein (2002) insisted that when studying teacher expectations, one must also look at the context in which teachers teach. At the same time, that context (including parental involvement and expectations) cannot become an excuse not to have high expectations for students (Rubie-Davies, 2014). Instead, context can help teachers understand how expectations are shaped and help them foster high expectations for each learner.

2.8 Purpose of Education in a Climate of High Expectations

High expectations should be embedded in a shared vision of a school's goals for its students. A strategic school plan or framework will help staff know not only the goals, but also the strategies and actions that are expected of them (Wallace Foundation, 2018). The Wallace Foundation (2018) found that when school districts focused on solving problems instead of focusing on a commonly-understood school mission, strategies to reach their goals were less effective. In my research, the school's purpose—its mission—was not commonly understood by all staff and parents. This made it difficult to maintain a collective focus on goals. It becomes difficult to maintain high expectations when there is a lack of collective focus, generated by different understandings of the purpose of

education. Hattie (2009) stated that learning intentions for students must be clear to foster success and that teachers need to work together to evaluate their own impact on student learning. This is not possible if the very purpose of education is not commonly understood. Teachers cannot have common goals if culture is very important for some and not important at all for others.

A commonly-understood purpose (mission and vision) of the school can guide the actions of education leaders and teachers (Allen and al., 2018). Cummins (2011) stated that policy makers and education leaders need to consider that cultural and language identity matter when it comes to student achievement. If cultural identity matters, than a school's commonly-understood purpose of education should be inclusive of its children's culture. Lezotte (1993) stated that schools need a climate of high expectations for success. A clearly articulated mission or vision that is commonly understood and accepted by staff leads to an engaged staff. Lezotte also stressed the importance of family school relationships. Miller, Latham, and Cahill (2016) went beyond the mission and vision statements to talk about the school's attitudes, values, perceptions, and relationships—the unwritten rules that guide actions, despite mission statements and goal setting. Attitudes, values, perceptions, and relationships are all part of cultural capital and need to be understood through the expectations lens.

2.8.1 Reflections on expectations and cultural capital.

In this literature review I revealed that middle-class families' parental practices offer an advantage to children when it comes to school success, although the benefits are stronger for White middle-class families. Teacher expectations are also a well-documented driver

of success, but their expectations seem to be influenced by ethnicity and middle-class parental practices, as well as their own teacher education. In addition, the system itself has standards and expectations that are aligned with the dominant middle-class group's standards and expectations.

In my research, I followed Lareau and Weininger's (2003) interpretation of cultural capital, including the idea that there is a "(relative) monopoly over cultural skills and competences that can yield profits" (p. 598). The generally-accepted cultural skills and competences I looked at in my research include literacy habits, use of language, and parental involvement. My findings led me to expand cultural capital theory to include culture and identity, and learning environment. I also enlarged the concept of parental involvement to include community and family involvement. These elements are specific to the Indigenous context where I conducted my research. My findings offer details on both parent/familial and educator expectations regarding academic success, literacy, language, culture and identity, learning environment, and parental involvement. In the course of my research I found that many participants (elders, parents, and educators) referred to two elements were not initially part of my research questions. These were *culture and identity* and *learning environment*. I added these elements to my findings because they also shape expectations for the school, the teachers, and the parents. When the expectation gap regarding culture, identity, and learning environment is too wide, achievement suffers..

By analyzing a variety of data, I learned how elders, parents, and teachers perceive teachers' understanding of the cultural capital that First Nations parents transfer to their

children. I explored how this understanding influences teaching practices, especially regarding expectations. Through the stories and data I collected, I learned how the interdependent layers of institutional structures and policies, family and community beliefs, and pedagogical practices that link classrooms, First Nations schools, public schools, and homes influence expectations. Understanding how expectations are shaped is important when it comes to finding new and more culturally-inclusive teaching approaches that will lead to each child's success. I was careful to not rely too heavily on Lareau's cultural model. Because of the complex ways in which child-rearing and cultural ways are entangled with the dominant culture (school structure and concerted cultivation) as being the "right" or "expected" way of doing things, it was essential to use the cultural capital framework "carefully and critically to avoid over-emphasizing the dominance of this logic as a cultural norm" (Perrier, 2013, p. 668). I added elements to the model (culture and identity, learning environment) to represent more accurately the voices of the Indigenous population and the voices of Settler teachers of this study. Understanding different parental cultural contexts and expectations for their children can become building blocks for fostering parental involvement in their child's formal education and creating strong literacy habits. These are strategies that work across cultures. This is important because leaders, researchers, policy makers, and decision makers have often tried to encourage non-achievers, whether from different cultural groups or from low SES families, by using middle-class solutions while ignoring their specific cultural or SES context (Bodovski, 2010; Chao, 1994; Gillies, 2005). Working with First Nations schools, I needed to read, reflect, and have many conversations with First Nations educational leaders, elders, and parents in order to walk sensitively through

the maze of different perceptions of success and expectations, of parental practices that foster school success, and of cultural worldviews and approaches that need to be inserted into the school's practices if there is to be a culture of high expectations for each student. I chose to let the data collected guide the findings by using a methodology that was appropriate for the complexity of the questions and context.

Chapter Three: Methodology - Grounded Theory and Indigenous Methodologies

If the artist does not perfect a new vision in his process of doing, he acts mechanically and repeats some old model fixed like a blueprint in his mind.

(John Dewey, 1934)

In this chapter I explain both grounded theory and Indigenous methodologies, and why I chose them for this research. I draw from other examples of studies conducted in Indigenous communities that have aligned these two methodologies. I also explain my research design, which integrated both methodologies and was very efficient for answering the research questions. Throughout this chapter, I weave the data and processes of analysis through my explanation of the methodologies and methods I used.

3.1 An Overview of Grounded Theory

Researchers want to do the best research they can. I am no exception. Knowing that aligning the research question with the methodology is an essential aspect of good research, I chose a methodology that was informed by the real-life issue I wanted to study. The purpose of my research and chosen research questions led me to grounded theory. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained that it is best to choose grounded theory to study relationships or to study being part of a system.

Crooks (2001) wrote that grounded theory is ideal for exploring social relationships and the behaviour of groups in situations where there have been few studies on the contextual elements that impact individuals' lives. Grounded theory methodology offers convenient tools to learn about perceptions, concerns, and behaviours in regards to particular phenomena or events. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, when they published their monograph *The Discovery of Grounded Theory*. The goal of this systematic methodology is to build theory from qualitative data:

We would all agree that in social research generating theory goes hand in hand with verifying it; but many sociologists have been diverted from this truism in their zeal to test either existing theories or a theory that they have barely started to generate.
(p. 2)

The idea of generating new theory from data made sense to other social scientists and grounded theory became increasingly popular. As opposed to research that tests a theory or hypothesis, this methodology is suited to research with the purpose of adding or creating. Grounded theory is a qualitative methodology that seeks answers to *how* and *why* questions. For example, how and why do people, organizations, or communities experience or respond to challenges, events, or difficult situations (Corbin & Strauss, 2008)? In my research, the difficult situation is the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. I wanted to use the lens of cultural capital and expectations to explore how schools and families experience this gap. Because studies have shown the impact of expectations and cultural capital on school success, I sought to understand *how* those expectations are shaped and *why* they are shaped a certain way. To reach that goal, I examined how structures, practices, resources, and activities perpetuate social inequality generation after generation. I also analysed data from semi-structured interviews and

observations. Because grounded theory is a qualitative methodology that seeks to answer how and why questions using a structured process to code and analyze data collected through several methods, it was aligned with the needs of this study.

3.1.1 Epistemology of grounded theory.

One of the major criticisms of the first generation of grounded theorists is that Glaser and Strauss wrote mostly about techniques and methods, never anchoring grounded theory in a theoretical perspective or an epistemology. In recent years, however, Corbin and Strauss (2008) have identified symbolic interactionism as the epistemology that drive grounded theory.

Symbolic interactionism refers to a particular form of interaction between people. Blumer (1969) explained that when people react to one another they react not only to each other's action but also to how they interpret that action and to the importance of that action as they perceive it. Mead (1936), another leading symbolic interactionist, popularized the idea that social science is in constant movement. He saw social science research as an accumulating body of knowledge that builds on the individual's experiences and often leads to a reconstruction of theory.

This body of knowledge also leads to useful actions, although these very actions may raise problems. These problems must be thought about so that reflections may shape new solutions. This process generates new knowledge. In a world perceived through a social lens, this endless dance between knowledge and action requires interplay between practice and inquiry (Fishman, 2006; Miller, 2004). In grounded theory, the proposed

back-and-forth of analyzing procedures and techniques results in constantly going from data and reflection to coding and creating categories. At the same time, the researcher maximizes new connections between concepts by sharpening the focus at each level of coding to generate new knowledge. This is aligned with interactionism as interactionists assume that knowledge is produced through actions and interactions and through reflective thinking about these actions and interactions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In grounded theory analysis, the researcher leans on reflective thinking to code data and to establish the prominent characteristics of each grouping of data. The next section will give more details on the different grounded theory schools.

3.1.2 Three grounded theory schools.

As of 1987 there were two fundamental schools for grounded theory. One continued to follow Glaser and Strauss' original formulation and the other diverged when Strauss (1987) published *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. While Glaser continued to advocate that there should not be a review of literature at the beginning of the process, Strauss thought that there should be a review. Glaser reasoned that to produce new theory, there should be the fewest outside influences possible. On the other hand, Strauss believed that a review was important to structure questions and to avoid repeating what had already been done.

The heart of the difference between the two schools lies in their beliefs and approaches to analysis. Glaser and Strauss (1967) originally described the data analysis process rather loosely. Glaser held onto this original view while Strauss (1987) attempted to clarify the data analysis process. Glaser (1992) accused Strauss of creating a new methodology, one

that was a “forced, full, conceptual description” (p. 5). In a second book written with Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), Strauss modified the original approach, stating that the intention had never been to promote rigidity, but rather to establish guidelines or suggested techniques.

Another difference between the two schools of grounded theory is the role of verification. Glaser (1992) maintained that grounded theory is inductive only and that the theory is grounded in the data. Strauss (1987) stated that induction, deduction, and verification are essential and should be an outcome of the analysis. Strauss and Corbin (1998) mentioned the importance of deduction followed by validation and elaboration, but no longer referred to verification. They defined validation as “a process of comparing concepts and their relationships against data during the research act to determine how well they stand up to such scrutiny” (p. 24). Through the years, Strauss’s (and then Strauss and Corbin’s) definition of grounded theory evolved. Corbin and Strauss (2008) recognized that their version of grounded theory had changed as it was shaped by debates about methodology. Glaser, on the other hand, remained faithful to the original model (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Many authors agree that Glaser’s grounded theory fits within the positivist paradigm (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Strauss and Corbin’s grounded theory model is generally seen as being embedded in the post-positivist paradigm (Hallberg, 2006; Charmaz, 2000). In their last iteration, Corbin and Strauss (2008) adopted some elements of constructivism.

Constructivism is the epistemology that has shaped the third school of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2005; Clarke, 2005; Bryant, 2002). The constructivists’ position assumes that

reality is a social construct. They understand that reality can never be an objective truth. Rather, multiple realities exist, anchored in different groups or different perspectives (Maxwell, 2011). As constructivism gains more popularity with social researchers, social scientists are moving away from the first generation of grounded theorists, who drew upon objectivist assumptions (that the researcher could remain neutral). The new generation of grounded theorists challenges the assumptions about seeing the world as an outward reality, about objectivity, and about the relationships between the participants and the researcher. Constructivist grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007) assumes that both the research process and the world that is studied are socially constructed through actions. Historical and social conditions restrain these actions. The actions I studied have historical and social conditions that restrain the actions of the research process and the worldviews. Constructivist grounded theory is helpful because it adds context sensitivity to Corbin and Strauss's rigorous processes.

Constructivist grounded theorists claim they maintain the methodology developed by Glaser and Strauss, but they strongly acknowledge that the researcher plays an essential role in developing the negotiation or dialogue between researcher and data and between researcher and participants, which will eventually lead to a grounded theory. Adding a constructivist epistemology therefore should not change the techniques or processes themselves but rather strengthen the methodology by paying attention to matters such as reflexivity, the context of the research, the effect of prior knowledge, and the existing literature (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Constructivism also helps to counter the imbalances of power that exist between the interviewer and interviewee (Mills, Bonner, & Francis,

2006) by verifying with participants the researcher's interpretation of their words and by making a place for participants to construct new knowledge. This was a very important aspect on my research, as I was a Settler conducting research in a First Nations context. I consulted with the participants regarding the interpretations I gave their voices. I also presented the findings to them before submitting this dissertation. I made small adjustments to the final findings, mostly concerning vocabulary (such as using "gifts" as opposed to "talents") rather than actual findings, as I had consulted many participants while analyzing and writing. The consultations during the analysis process led to important changes such as the need to go beyond the original questions and include new concepts. Elders and other participants asserted that it was essential to include concepts such as culture and learning environment in this study. From a methodological point of view, grounded theory allowed for these new concepts to emerge in the findings.

Charmaz (2005) is generally recognized as having brought constructivism into grounded theory. While they do not completely agree with constructivist grounded theory, Lock and Strong (2010), along with Corbin (Strauss & Corbin, 2008), "agree[d] with the constructivist viewpoint that concepts and theories are constructed by researchers out of stories that are constructed by research participants who are trying to explain and make sense out of their experiences and/or lives, both to the researcher and themselves" (p. 10). She went on to say that grounded theorists construct knowledge through multiple analyses. We do not separate the person we are from the research and the analysis that we do. She said, "Therefore, we must be self-reflective about how we influence the research process and, in turn, how it influences us" (p. 11). Because I was conducting a cross-

cultural study, I was aware that the self-reflection must include different points of view, points of view I can only integrate by spending a lot of time with First Nations people. As epistemology continues to evolve, so will the methodologies that drive qualitative research, including grounded theory. The nature of qualitative research is fluid, evolving, and dynamic and so methodologies will evolve in the midst of trying to understand the complexity of relationships and realities. Constructivist grounded theorists reflect the recent shifts in approaches to qualitative research (Lincoln, 2010; Charmaz, 2005). However, this trend toward interpretive and postmodern research also makes studies vulnerable to criticism (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

This vulnerability could explain why Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), while adhering to self-reflectivity and the idea that theories are constructs, also stated very clearly that she advocated for using conceptual language when discussing findings. Concepts help us arrive at a shared understanding and assign words to new knowledge. It is only with a shared conceptual language that people can discuss, have conflicts, negotiate, and develop new knowledge-based practice (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). While no one can boast that his or her knowledge fully reflects the world, knowledge does help us understand parts of that world. Knowledge built from conceptual language can in turn guide practice. In my findings, I have used conceptual language in order to foster a common understanding. Conceptual language requires an organisational design of data at a high level of abstraction, while capturing the complexity of structures and keeping the design within the boundaries of those structures. I have organized my findings in conceptual language—using a map to represent the data—within complex structures that respect their own boundaries (Ter Hofstede, Proper, & Weide, 1993). For example, I categorized

the data regarding academic expectations according to a specific definition and according to the research on academic expectations. When other forms of expectations emerged (i.e., traditional cultural teachings) I coded them under a different category in the design. I struggled with the idea of conceptual language in a First Nations context. Elders and other participants discussed it with me and acknowledged its usefulness in this particular context.

Glaser (2002b) acknowledged that the researchers are human beings and will to some degree try to symbolize data and impart their personal biases to interpretations. But he argued that because grounded theory is not for accurate description, it is possible for the researcher to find patterns in the data that are not affected by who the researcher is.

Glaser also stressed the importance of concepts when doing grounded theory studies: “Multiple perspectives among participants is often the case and then the GT researcher comes along and raises these perspectives to the abstract level of conceptualization hoping to see the underlying or latent pattern, another perspective” (p. 2). Because I had been exposed to different realities and worldviews through my experiences in First Nations communities, schools, and ceremonies, and was aware of how these experiences have changed the way I perceive some events or words, I believed it would be impossible to avoid influencing the findings. The multiple perspectives that are “raised to the abstract level” are not only seen through the researcher’s worldviews and bias, but the researcher may omit some perspectives, not understanding what exactly was shared because of her own worldviews and biases. A total abstraction of conceptualization is not possible, as the patterns that will be seen or found by the researcher can only be rooted in

elements already known to the researcher. It was therefore important for me to validate my findings with First Nations leaders or elders, to expand the range of patterns I saw as I analyzed and wrote.

Constructivist grounded theory tends to focus more on interviews as a data collection technique rather than on other forms of data collection that are also used in grounded theory. Therefore, it does not address all aspects of grounded theory (Glaser, 2002a). Charmaz (2006) disagrees with this, as she stated that constructivist grounded theory respects five principles of grounded theory: 1) the breakdown of inquiry; 2) the simultaneity of data collection and analysis; 3) the generation of new theory; 4) the focusing of concepts and categories through theoretical sampling; and 5) the orientation of a more abstract analytic level.

As the debate is ongoing, in the following table I compare the different grounded theory methodologies, clarifying my choice of methodology.

Table 2. *Comparing Glaserian, Straussian, and Constructivist Grounded Theory*

	Schools of Grounded Theory		
	Glaserian	Straussian	Constructivist
Literature	No literature review: Begin with interest in subject, a general sense of curiosity	Do a literature review: Begin with an idea of what has already been done	Do a literature review: Begin with an idea of what has already been done
Epistemology	Objectivism	Interactionism, with some elements of constructivism	Constructivism

Theoretical Perspectives	Multiple	Multiple	Constructivist
Researcher	The researcher is passive; Should “interview self”	The researcher is active; Should be aware of assumptions and self (reflexivity)	The researcher is active, co-constructing with participants; Should be aware of assumptions and self (reflexivity)
Theoretical Sensitivity	Rooted in data immersion	Rooted in the methods and in reflexivity	Rooted in relationships with participants and in reflexivity

For my study, I did not adopt Glaser’s grounded theory. I need to read and be immersed in writings from First Nations researchers and studies that differ from my own culture in order to offer findings that would be useful to First Nations leaders and communities.

Unlike Glaser, I do not believe researchers can ever be objective. I followed Corbin and Strauss’s guidelines and suggested techniques to ensure a more rigorous research. I also integrated constructivist grounded theory principles, such as validating interpretations of participants’ words and presenting findings to participants for their comments. I

presented the results to elders and other participants. It felt more respectful of how different people experience reality as these realities are shaped by their own worldviews, attitudes, and values. It led to subtle but essential changes in my interpretation. For

example, I had written about the relationship between the child and *the* land. Elders told me I needed to take out the word “the” because writing “the land” objectifies land, making it less important than a person. Therefore, I wrote “relationship between child and land,” making child and land equal, part of each other. I also went back to four

Indigenous educator leaders (two in each community) who had talked about families needing help with a bedtime and a morning routine. I wanted to make sure my interpretation of their words was adequate—middle-class families also needed help with basic parenting skills.

3.1.3 Criteria for grounded theory studies.

Grounded theory studies should aim for certain criteria to ensure quality. But what is quality? Corbin and Strauss (2008) stated that it is difficult to pinpoint exactly what quality is. Corbin (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) said that she agreed with Seale (2002) when he declared, “quality is elusive, hard to specify, but we often feel we know it when we see it. In this respect research is like art rather than science” (p. 102). For Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001), quality is present when “elegant and innovative thinking can be balanced with reasonable claims, presentation of evidence, and the critical application of methods” (p. 527). In this description of quality many words (e.g., elegant, reasonable) are subjective; their concepts are difficult to measure.

Creswell and Miller (2000) suggested the following procedures to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of findings:

1. prolonged engagement and persistent observation in the field
2. triangulation
3. using peer review or debriefing
4. clarifying researcher bias
5. negative case analysis
6. external audits by experts

7. rich thick description

The idea is not to go through all these, but rather to choose at least one procedure. For example, triangulation enhances credibility and trustworthiness by obtaining the same findings using more than one approach to the investigation of the research question (Patton, 2002). Other researchers (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998) also identified triangulation as a way to establish validity of qualitative studies.

Triangulation is the procedure I used to ensure the credibility and the trustworthiness of my study. Patton (2002) proposed four forms of triangulation:

1. Data triangulation: gathering data through several methods
2. Data source triangulation: using different types of data sources
3. Investigator triangulation: using more than one researcher in the field to interpret and analyse data
4. Theoretical or perspective triangulation: using more than one theory or perspective to interpret data

I gathered data through three methods: Semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documents (e.g., school plans, reports, and policies). I also relied on my memo notes, which were my reflections and questions after reading documents, doing an interview, or conducting an observation. Key findings of this study are the result of evidence from different sources, including semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and other educators, and elders; observations, school plans and reports; and other studies and articles. While I did most of my analyzing and interpretation by hand, with different coloured highlighters and by building and rebuilding tables and charts to

organize data, I also used Atlas.ti to pull out categories. I also reached out to different Indigenous leaders to validate or adjust my interpretations, which enabled them to contribute to the analysis. Finally, I based my research on three leading theorists: Lareau's model on cultural capital, Delpit's research on the culture of power in the schools, and Battiste's research on the colonial education system in Canada.

In terms of criteria specifically related to grounded theory studies, I also followed Charmaz's (2006) criteria: credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. As I mostly applied the techniques of her school of grounded theory for my study, it makes sense to reflect upon how I satisfied these criteria. In Table 3 below I explain these criteria and indicate how my study aligns with them.

Table 3. *Criteria for Grounded Theory Studies (Charmaz, 2006) and my Research*

Criterion	Description of criterion	My research
Credibility	<p>Developing intimate familiarity with context and topic of the study</p> <p>Engaging in evidence-based procedures to ensure credibility</p> <p>Demonstrating strong links between data, analyses and arguments</p>	<p>Developed familiarity with context and topic by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spending time in First Nations communities and schools • Participating in First Nations events • Member of Provincial Aboriginal Education Committee • Member of Treaty Education Committee • Member of the National Round Table on Education regarding the Truth and Reconciliation report • Reading pertinent Indigenous studies • Reading literature on social reproduction, parental involvement, literacy, cultural capital, culture of power, expectations, grounded theory, Indigenous methodologies, Indigenous perspectives on education, residential school and legacy <p>Applied triangulation procedure</p> <p>Applied the three phases of coding</p> <p>Applied theoretical sampling practices (did interviews and gathered other data until no new information was offered)</p> <p>Engaged in memo writing</p> <p>Was aware of my own theoretical sensitivity</p>

Criterion	Description of criterion	My research
Originality	Ensuring social and theoretical significance to the study	Broke barriers by addressing questions regarding a well-known driver of achievement (expectations) and embedding it in social reproduction theory (cultural capital) Created a conceptual framework, <i>Education Success Map</i> , for both pedagogical and policy-related purposes, in order to support First Nations children in their schooling journey
	Challenging or extending concepts and practices	Challenged the practice of promoting evidence-based teaching approaches in a cross-cultural context without allowing for cultural differences or histories
	Developing new insights on studied situation or phenomena	Increased consciousness of the power of perceptions linked to expectations and cultural capital: This can help First Nations parents and communities to better advocate for their children in band-operated and provincial schools
Resonance	Describing the experiences of the participants	Used words of participants often in this research
	Making connections between systems, institutions, communities and individuals when possible	Analysed policies and other documents to realize the importance of community when it comes to school success and parental involvement
	Ensuring findings that make sense to participants	Presented findings to participants before submitting this dissertation
	Offering findings that bring deeper insights about their worlds and their lives	Will present findings to participating communities. The Education Success Map is a tool they can adjust to their worlds and perspectives

Criterion	Description of criterion	My research
Usefulness	Contributing to knowledge	Increased consciousness of the power that lies in the perception of the purpose of education, of the perceptions linked to expectations and cultural capital in a First Nations context The methodology itself in this study is a contribution to knowledge
	Contributing to society	A better understanding of the cultural capital that children bring with them to school can help create learning environments that fit their needs, within a context where high expectations are upheld for each learner and where parents, caregivers and community participate
	Findings can become foundation for further studies	The Education Success Map can be a tool to actualize some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada report's (2015) recommendations The conceptual framework resulting from this study should be studied further The findings can lead further studies on teaching approaches and policies in cross-cultural contexts

In the next sections I add details to some of the techniques that I have identified as part of my methodology design in Table 3.

3.1.4 Data collection and analysis.

At the core of the grounded theory methodology is the process of parallel data collection and analysis. Grounded theory is anchored in an iterative cycle of induction and deduction, a constant back-and-forth between collecting data and comparing results, between validating interpretations and comparing results. Through this cycle of data

collection and analysis, I coded the data, moving from broader categories to more focused categories, until a theory emerged (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I then validated that theory through presentations and discussions with participating communities. Before I explain the results, I will detail how I gathered the data.

I respected the need to triangulate my data collection. The documents I analyzed included school plans, Grade 2 literacy provincial assessment scores, classroom books, school policies (one school), school newsletters, a professional learning community (PLC) worksheet (one school), and a guideline document for teachers (one school). However, most of the data came from the participants' voices.

The participants in my study were two Grade 3 classes and one Grade 2 class in two band-operated schools, along with other educators, staff members, elders, parents, and community members. The two schools are in New Brunswick, one on Mi'kmaq territory and the other on Wolastoqiyik territory. In both cases, students have to transit to public school, in Grade 6 in one instance and in Grade 9 in the other, as none of the band-operated schools go all the way to Grade 12. In addition to the students in the classroom, there were 32 participants: three elders, 20 educators, and 9 parents. Three of the educators were the classroom teachers of the classes where I conducted observations. I also observed specialist teachers when they were in those classrooms. I conducted semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 1988) with all 32 participants; two were small group interviews while the other interviews were individual conversations. Mirror interviews with parents, elders, and teachers helped me compare perceptions and actions regarding

expectations, especially in relation to literacy habits, parental involvement, and school in general, as well as their perceived and adopted practices regarding cultural capital.

Two of the elders were also Indigenous scholars and had been involved in the Settlers' world of decision-making in education. I usually use the term *educator* to refer to participants from the participating schools, to protect confidentiality. In addition, for findings that were the same in both schools, I do not differentiate between schools or between classes, as this ensures more confidentiality. In total, 11 educators were from one school, while nine were from the other school. Educator participants included two education directors, two principals, 14 teachers, and two assistant-teachers. The teacher group included three classroom teachers and 11 specialist teachers or teachers providing a specific service (literacy, resource, culture, behaviour, project coordinator, liaison with family, and speech therapy). Only four of the 20 educators did not hold a university degree, but two of those four held a college degree. In total, 10 non-Indigenous educators and 10 Indigenous educators participated in this study. The non-Indigenous educators all had more than five years' experience teaching, though two of these had less than five years in a First Nations school. For the ten Indigenous participants, only two participants had less than five years' teaching experience.

Nine parents participated in this study. Although I use the word *parent*, two of these parents are grandmothers who are caregivers and another parent also parents other children in addition to her biological children. In total, there were two parents from a vulnerable context and seven middle-class parents. According to Statistics Canada (2012) families earning between \$44,660 and \$95,700 per year are considered middle-class

families. Earning over \$95,700 annually puts families in the superior class bracket. In this study, six middle-class parents, in addition to earning a middle-class (or superior class) salary, also had a postsecondary degree or diploma. It is worth mentioning that only four of the nine parents had a child or grandchild in the classes where I observed. The other five had a child or a grandchild attending the school.

All the interviews were audio-taped, except for one. In that one case, the participant agreed to do an interview but did not want to be recorded. I wrote down her answers and validated them with her on the spot. The other interviews were transcribed. All the interviews were coded to protect the identities of participants. The audio files were destroyed after the transcription and the transcriptions were kept under lock in my office. The following tables give more information about the participants in this study.

Table 4. *Participants in Both Schools*

	Educators	Elders	Total
Indigenous	10	3	21
Settler	10	0	11
Total	20	3	32

Table 5. *Parents from Both Communities*

Social class	Parents
Middle class	7
Low SES	2
Total	9

Table 6. *Educators in Both Schools*

	Leaders¹	Teachers	Instructors²	Teacher assistants
Indigenous	2	4	2	2
Settler	2	7	1	0
Total	4	11	3	2

In addition to document analysis and interviews, I also conducted observations.

Throughout the data gathering, I wrote memo notes that I later analyzed. These different sources of data grounded the analysis in different perspectives (Yin, 2011). In the three classrooms where I conducted observations, two teachers were Settlers and one teacher was Indigenous. I also observed specialist teachers when they were in the targeted classroom, making it easier to respect confidentiality when describing findings, as there were more than three teachers involved. I conducted a total of 21 observations in these three classrooms. Each observation was for a minimum of two periods and up to half of a day. My first observation was on December 8, 2016 and the last observation was on June 20, 2017, with most of the observations in January, February, and March 2017 (15 observation sessions). After each interview and observation I engaged in memo writing.

3.1.5 Memo writing.

Memos are the researcher's written reflections and thoughts during the process of doing grounded theory research. They differ in their themes, intensity, theoretical content, and usefulness to the end product (Birks & Mills, 2011). Memo writing is a continuous process, from the planning of a research project to the end of the research. With time, these memos will change into findings. Writing steadily and abundantly helps to build the

¹ A leader is an education director or a school administrator

² An instructor is someone who is not a certified teacher but who teaches in the school regarding culture or in some cases does behaviour interventions

researcher's intellectual capacity. Clarke (2005) compared memos to "intellectual capital in the bank" (p. 85).

I wrote memos after every observation and every interview, and also after reading documents such as school plans. It allowed me to reflect on the data and to make a note of which data I might need to gather next. For example, I asked the school principal for the school improvement plan when I started noticing that there seemed to be tension regarding the purpose of school. The school plan helped me understand what had been targeted as priority. My memos were reflections and thoughts on the themes that were emerging, but also questions regarding my own education and assumptions. As I reread them during the writing of this dissertation, I realized that I had gone through a decolonizing process, one memo at a time. As more questions emerged regarding my own colonized mind, I realized the importance of continuing my journey of decolonization. I remember a memo early on that I wrote through my teacher education lens, where I thought a non-education outing with parents during a school day was not a good way to maximize learning time! But as I progressed in my data gathering and analysis, I realized that in the Indigenous communities participating in this study, where the legacy of residential school is still felt collectively, schools need to make extra efforts to build strong family-school relationships. This school was taking the time to tell parents and families that they actually care about them and want to get to know them. They want them to be involved. While the memos helped map out my own decolonizing process, they also served other purposes.

The memos helped me stay focused, analyze, and know which concepts I needed to research. They helped me tease out the first concepts and eased the coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). My memos were also instrumental in providing a direction for theoretical sampling (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I did not conduct a single interview or observation in April 2017. Instead, I took the time to re-read my observations, listen to interviews, and read my memos. This helped me to decide what data gathering I still needed to do in May and June. Through this process, I realized I needed to interview more parents, as I had not yet spoken with a parent in a vulnerable context. I also realized I needed to speak to at least one other elder, as three elders would constitute a more solid voice in this research, especially for readers with a Western perception of validity. I had seen patterns emerging from my observations and memos, but I needed more evidence. For example, I wanted to confirm or deny the tendency of a parent or another teacher to interrupt classroom teachers during every observation. I went through the same process of re-reading, looking for concepts, listening to interviews, reading documents and research, and analyzing in July and August 2017. I then asked educators for documents that I felt were missing from my data. Through this time, I often went back to participants to clarify or validate my interpretations.

3.1.6 Theoretical sampling.

Part of conducting grounded theory research is collecting data through a variety of methods. The idea of theoretical sampling is “to focus and feed the constant comparative analysis of data” (Birks & Mills, 2011, p. 10). Theoretical sampling is different from other types of sampling because it is concept-driven. It helps the researcher study relevant

concepts in depth. It is especially important when the study is concentrating on new areas; theoretical sampling allows the researcher to make findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Theoretical sampling means that I followed the cycle of gathering and analyzing data until I reached the point of saturation (Glaser, 1978; Mason, 2010). I gathered data, analyzed it, collected more data, analyzed it some more, and did that one last time before attaining the point of saturation. For example, after analyzing transcripts of interviews, I decided to gather documentation to help me better understand new concepts that came out of the first analysis, even though I had already done a literature review. These new concepts included culture, learning environment, and safety. Saturation also meant that I had thoroughly explained all the original concepts of the research, which were the elements of cultural capital that matter when it comes to school success: literacy habits, parental involvement, expectations, and use of language. Finally, saturation meant that I explained those elements of cultural capital through educators' expectations lens. It is difficult to identify the point of saturation because of its flexible nature. New data can always add something, but there comes a point when those add-ons are minimal and do not really contribute to the emerging findings. Nevertheless, the saturation point can be considered arbitrary (Mason, 2010) and I needed to make choices. For example, while I added *culture* to my research as a concept because so many participants talked about it, I did not go deeply into participants' thoughts on the elements of culture they felt were essential because I felt this would not bring more clarity to the research questions. I know that they generally thought of culture as something that had been taken away and that

they were now reviving: their ceremonies, their languages, and the sacredness of relationships to self, others, and land. Although focusing on specific elements of culture is essential to integrating culture into curricula and teaching approaches, I felt that that was a different research project. I therefore chose to limit my analysis to the fact that culture is important to many people when it comes to education and to understanding how teachers perceive the cultural capital that First Nations parents and families transfer to their children.

3.1.7 Analyzing data.

I employed a systematic design in data analysis for grounded theory studies that uses three phases for coding data: open, axial, and selected coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). *Open coding* is about breaking data apart to pull out concepts that can form groups of raw data. Those concepts must be qualified according to their properties and dimensions. This first coding of data is the stepping stone for further data collection and analysis. Although I used the computer program Atlas.ti, I followed Strauss & Corbin's (1994) suggestion that the program should not do all the coding. This proved to be important when the program picked up varieties of the word "safe" but could not interpret that in two of the interview transcriptions, the word "safe" was being used in the context that some children felt safer at school than in their home setting. This was in direct opposition to what other participants were saying, which was that many families did not see school as not safe because of the legacy of the residential schools. I did most of my analyzing by hand, using highlighters for different concepts, gathering information in tables, and comparing these tables with what I had highlighted or coded. I used coloured Post-it notes to combine concepts and drew representations or diagrams to organize concepts. Throughout this process, I kept reading different studies, mostly Indigenous, that were pertinent to my study, while analyzing transcriptions and observations. I added the document analysis at the end of each coding phase, as the documents have their own story to tell. In the early analytical and coding stage, it was crucial for me to get very close to the data, to brainstorm and identify meaning, and to conceptualize those meanings. At the same time, I was re-reading my memos frequently so as to not forget

the reflections and the questions that I wanted to answer. My analysis process was vigorous and resulted in a strong foundation that led to rich descriptions and solid theory building (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In open coding, I divided raw data into manageable sections: individual and system expectations and perceptions of others' expectations. Analyzing the interview transcriptions allowed me to pull out participants' perceptions of "others" (school if they were parents, parents if they were educators, parents and educators if they were elders). The transcriptions, documents, my observations, and my memos were the data for analyzing individual expectations (both what they said and what I observed) and the system's expectations.

As I analyzed the data, I pulled out quotes from transcriptions or my observations and labeled them with a concept (or several concepts). I then organized these concepts into tables. I labelled each concept with the code I had assigned the participants or date of observation so I refer go back to full transcript or observation. The final concepts that emerged from that opening coding were: academic, literacy, outdoor education, Indigenous knowledge, use of language, language and culture, relationships, safety, parental involvement, mistrust, communication, community, family, history, and public school. Keeping in mind that I was analyzing these concepts through the lenses of cultural capital and expectations, I read more literature on those concepts to avoid getting lost in the process. Within this step, some of the concepts I had identified changed. For example, "teaching in nature" became "outdoor education." I continued writing memos and sometimes made graphics of how to combine concepts.

In the second step, *axial coding*, my goal was to group the concepts into categories. These categories had to reflect similar elements among codes. Strauss and Corbin (1998) explained that the term *axial coding* echoes the idea of grouping the open codes around specific axes. As I engaged in categorizing or axial coding, I identified properties through my interpretive lens and thus was already starting to pull meaning from the data. I also turned to the literature and returned to some participants to ensure a stronger understanding of the properties and dimensions of the concepts. For example, I went back to one participant to better understand which type of families she was referring to when she shared that families needed parenting coaching. I went back to elders to talk more about the concept of relationships. It was in this stage that I determined that I needed a few more observations and a few more interviews. I continued to write in my memos the very important question: Can research conducted in a dominant culture context be applied successfully in an Indigenous context? I was starting to doubt some of the literature I had used in my proposal. I did find literature that had studied that very question (Trudgett et al., 2017). This was helpful in explaining why some of my findings were not aligned with Western research and it allowed me to sharpen and construct validation (Eisenhardt, 1999). Validating my interpretations with the participants also helped sharpen construct validation (Charmaz, 2006). For example, at this point in the research I found that the very purpose of education—the expectation of education itself—is different depending on the participants. Having a different point of entry has a huge impact on success, as it creates a non-alignment that is a disadvantage for children, as cultural capital theory has demonstrated. At the end of this stage I pulled out many concepts: academic, literacy, language and culture, use of language, relationships, parental involvement,

communication, safety, trust, and outdoor education. For each of these concepts, I made tables to gather individual expectations (verbal and observed), perceived expectations of others, and system expectations (documents and some observations). From these tables, I found patterns that I examined to see whether they aligned with cultural capital theory. I targeted elements of parental involvement, literacy habits and use of language. But so many participants mentioned culture that I chose to include it as a category. At this point I did not know how I was going to integrate culture to this research, but I knew it was essential.

Before exploring the third analytic level, it is important to mention that sometimes open or axial coding may require extra rounds of analysis before it is ready for selective coding. I did go back twice to gather more data after a few weeks of analyzing. This does not include sporadic validation or questions asked to participants after their interview. In the end, the axial coding generated the following categories: 1) Purpose of education and 2) Expectations, literacy, language and culture, use of language, relationships, parental involvement, and communication.

The last analytic level, *selective coding* (McCaslin & Scott, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) refers to the treatment of the various code groups by integrating, interpreting, and refining the constructed theory (Charmaz, 2006). In this phase, I decided how the concepts related to each other and to a core category, as well as what stories they communicated. I did more analysis, more interpretation, and more validating from the participants. To do this I assembled the collection of concepts and categories that I had labeled. Corbin and Strauss (2008) called these actions *integration*: “Rereading memos,

creating the story line, doing diagrams, and just plain thinking are all techniques that analysts can use to help them arrive at final integration” (p. 274).

This stage of analysis integrates all the interpretations of the previous analysis. It is the final stage that leads to the construction of a theory. I produced a general framework, checked it for gaps, and validated it. Then I went back to my memos, tables, and sometimes to my transcriptions, documents, and observations, to feed each major category with pertinent information. Here at the core of this research the fact emerged that expectations in an Indigenous context need to be embedded in a common understanding of the purpose of education. Ethnicity seemed to matter more than social class in this study. My findings led me to understand that educators, Indigenous or not, generally have low academic expectations of Indigenous students and do not believe that Indigenous parents generally transfer the necessary cultural capital to succeed. However, I found evidence that those low expectations are embedded in different understandings of the purpose of education. The final categories in my research were:

- Purpose of education
- Family and community
- Academic (including literacy)
- Learning environment
- Expectations

Culture was woven into all the categories because when I cross-analyzed the data, trying to see if the different categories contained similar patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994), I

found that culture belonged in each of them. Figure 1 illustrates the three phases of coding with the results of the analyses.

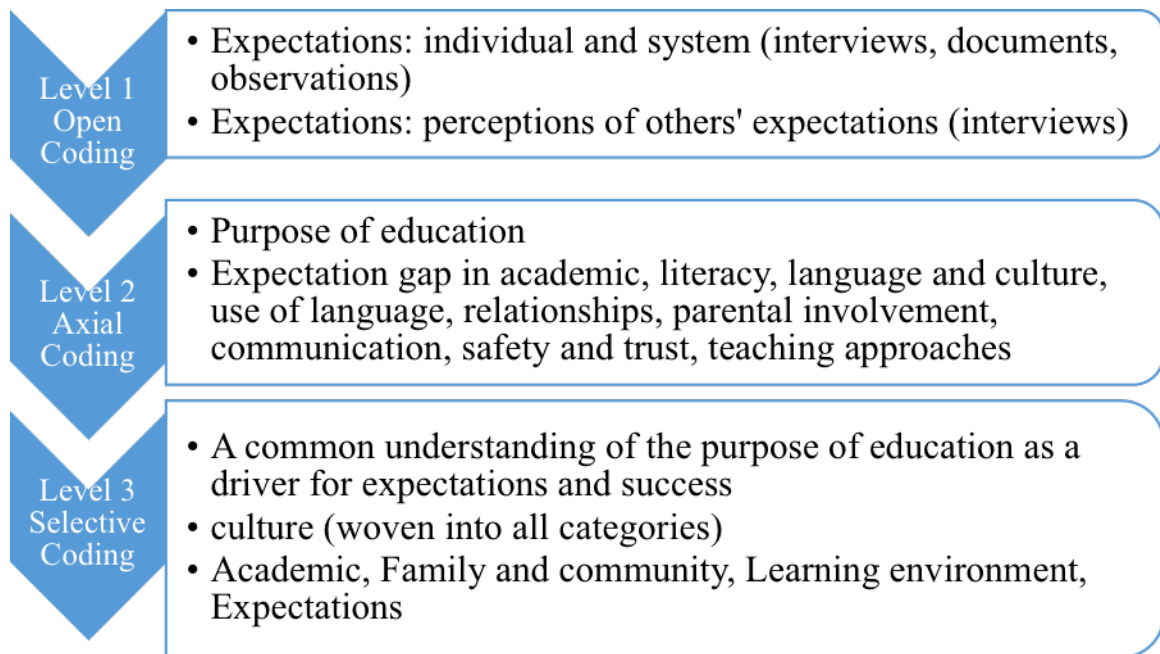


Figure 1. Three Phases of Coding

Through these phases of analyzing, I integrated practices drawn from Indigenous methodologies, which I explain in Table 7. Charmaz (2006) stated that other methodologies can complement a grounded theory approach. Like Charmaz, I believe we do not discover theories. Rather, we construct them through our past and present experiences, our research practices, our worldviews, and our relationships with people. In other words, the participants' reactions to my interpretations and their support to look at data through their worldviews were invaluable to constructing the final interpretations of data.

3.1.8 Theoretical sensitivity.

Throughout the different procedures of grounded theory, I made a point of being aware of my theoretical sensitivity. The concept of theoretical sensitivity relates to how a researcher is the sum of all his or her experiences. For my own research, it also meant that I continued to participate in First Nations cultural events and conferences and to foster my relationships with First Nations people. My research is also informed by own Acadian cultural heritage. I followed Charmaz's (2006) pathway to theoretical sensitivity by reflecting often and seeking strong relationships with participants and their communities. I found that this process nourished my reflections.

3.1.9 Strengths of grounded theory.

Grounded theory was created to study social phenomena. The constant comparisons involved in this methodology help to construct new theory and give new insight into phenomena (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Charmaz (2003) recommended this methodology because of its capacity to help us understand complex social issues. Grounded theory helps the researcher step out of what is known to enter into the participants' world and see the world through their perspectives. This can lead to new knowledge, a broadening of empirical knowledge, and new practices that contribute to the making of a better world (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). It is a methodology that has been used successfully in First Nations contexts (e.g., Bainbridge, 2011; Maar, Manitowabi, Gzik, McGregor, & Corbiere, 2011).

Another strength of grounded theory lies in its potential to aid us in understanding how social structures work and recommending appropriate interventions (Clarke, 2005). This

was important to me as I was trying to find new understanding of the educational gap between First Nations students and non-Indigenous students in New Brunswick. As Delpit (2012) has claimed, there is no gap when children are born. It is therefore time to look at the system to understand why it is not working for a particular cultural group. Grounded theory can contribute to a stronger understanding of the social phenomena that keep the learning gap wide despite programs or initiatives that have been put in place for First Nations students (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2011). Understanding can lead to more effective policies and teaching practices. However, as with any methodologies, grounded theory also has limitations.

3.1.10 Limitations and criticisms of grounded theory and of this research.

One of the criticisms of grounded theory lies in its flexibility. Glaser (1992), Strauss and Corbin (2008), and Charmaz (2005) all stressed that the researcher cannot simply follow grounded theory's proposed steps like a recipe. As in all qualitative methodology, the researcher must decide how to interpret, dialogue with, and position the data. The success of the methodology relies greatly on the researcher.

Bartlett and Payne (1997) criticized the length of time it takes for the analysis, the memo writing, and the coding process. They believed that it might be easy for the researcher to get lost in this tedious process. I feel I was very productive and focused with my time so I did not get lost in the process, although I did have moments where I had to begin again. This is where the reflections come in. By writing reflections, the researcher becomes aware of getting lost and of needing to re-start.

Corbin and Strauss (2008), Pillow (2003), and Glaser (2002a) also cautioned about constructivist grounded theory, as it can make the researcher's impact on the data and the relationships between the researcher and participants more important than finding meaningful patterns that generate a conceptual framework for shaping policies, practices, and programs that meet the participants' needs. Indeed, Holton (2010) stated that the emergence of a core category—isolating one main preoccupation of participants—is a condition of grounded theory. Constructivist grounded theory does not adhere to that principle, as the researcher co-constructs with the participants. I will show in a later section that most grounded theory research with First Nations has been constructivist because it includes the voices and experiences of First Nations participants. This was my approach as well.

This research has limitations. More research is needed to understand in a more comprehensive way how sharing a common purpose of education could impact education success. My model is based on interviews, observations, documents, and literature but it needs to be tested and adjusted accordingly. Even though I interviewed 32 participants, my choice to break them into participant categories—elders, parents, and educators—means that they may or may not represent their group's views. What I can state after completing this study is that it represents the views of the people I interviewed. Building the necessary relationships and obtaining consent took time, as it should, but it also limited the classroom observations to a few months, in this case from December to June. To continue into another school year would have meant some new teachers and new principals. While I chose to observe students, it would be beneficial to do a more in-depth

study with students. For example, how do student to student interactions communicate learning expectations? Finally, I conducted this study in band-operated schools. Further studies in public schools, using these findings, could provide even more insight regarding how teachers understand the cultural capital transferred from parents to children and how this understanding influences their expectations of Indigenous students. Finally, more studies are needed to test and adjust the model I propose in this study. Nonetheless, I feel this research will contribute to discussions of the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

3.2 Indigenous Methodologies

Even though there are limitations to this study, the findings are useful both for immediate application and as the basis for new studies. Moreover, I generated the findings using a research design that integrates Indigenous and Western methodologies, drawing from the strength of both methodologies. I explained grounded theory was explained in the previous section. In the next section I explain Indigenous methodologies. In the last section of the methodology chapter I reveal the integrated research design.

3.2.1 Qualitative methodologies and Indigenous peoples.

Following grounded theory processes to conduct research requires very special attention when the researcher's culture is different from that of participants, as it was in my case. Barnes (1996) suggested that there are certain requirements for doing this kind of research, including personal or professional experience in the participants' culture, knowledge of the professional literature of the participants' culture, and a constant awareness of the cultural perspectives of the participants as concepts emerge and are

constructed. Qualitative methodologies seeking to understand the participants' perceptions will fail to do so if cultural perceptions and knowledge are not integrated into the analytical process. Without this awareness and constant work to experience First Nations culture and to listen to elders and other First Nations leaders, there would have been a risk of interpreting data through my own cultural lens, possibly perpetuating harmful myths instead of offering findings that are useful to participants.

This is true of all cross-cultural research, but it is even more important when it comes to Indigenous research. Duran and Duran (1995) stated that

The problem of irrelevant research and clinical practice would not be so destructive to Native American people if institutional racism did not pervade most of the academic settings for research and theoretical construction. These institutions not only discredit thinking that is not Western but also engage in practices that imply that people who do not subscribe to their worldviews are genetically inferior. (p. 93)

This statement mirrors Smith's (1999) reflections on research and its impact on Indigenous people. She stated that scientific research is one of the ways that colonialism continues to be present and regulated; "for Indigenous Peoples universities are regarded as rather elite institutions which reproduce themselves through various systems of privilege" (p. 129). It is safe to conclude that cultural perceptions and knowledge must be integrated into the analytical process if studies are to move away from a colonialist perspective. Starting at the very beginning of the research process, I looked in depth at what informed consent means in communities that view knowledge differently than do Western institutions of research.

3.2.2 Informed consent: whose rules?

Researchers have an ethical responsibility toward the participants that needs to go beyond a single signed form that participants may or may not understand. For example, a United Nations resolution (United Nations Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination, Resolution 1993/44 of 26, August 1993) stated that “Indigenous Peoples’ ownership and custody of their heritage must continue to be collective, permanent and inalienable, as prescribed by the customs, rules and practices of each people” (p. 4). In the Western paradigm of individualism, individuals can share knowledge for the purpose of research through informed consent. But the collective ownership of knowledge, as implied by Indigenous worldviews, invalidates individual informed consent.

Smith (1999) stated:

Indigenous groups argue that legal definitions of ethics are framed in ways which contain the Western sense of the individual and of individualized property. For example, the right of an individual to give his or her own knowledge, or the right to give informed consent. The social ‘good’ against which ethical standards are determined is based on the same beliefs about the individual and individual property. (p.118)

The Mi’kmaq ecological knowledge study protocol (Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi’kmaq Chiefs, 2007) also supports collective consent when doing research. In this context, it seems that favouring the individual’s right to participate in research over the collective right to choosing to share knowledge becomes a deliberate lack of acknowledgment that different social organizations and different cultural worldviews not only exist, but are just as valuable as Western understandings.

Piquemal (2000) proposed four principles to ensure respectful informed consent when conducting research in an Indigenous community:

- Negotiating responsibilities prior to seeking free and informed consent
- Obtaining free and informed consent from the relevant authorities: collective and individual
- Confirming consent to ensure that consent is ongoing
- Completing the circle: providing the community with data

These principles acknowledge the importance of an on-going relationship between participants and researcher, a relationship that needs to be fostered throughout the research project, including sharing data and findings. I intend to follow those principles to the end by offering workshops in the schools that participated after I have defended this dissertation.

The Assembly of First Nations (First Nations Centre des Premières Nations, 2007) in their Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession document, gives clear guidelines about consent:

A process to obtain the free, prior and informed consents from both the community affected and its individual participants should be undertaken sufficiently in advance of the proposed start of research activities and should take into account the community's own legitimate decision-making processes, regarding all the phases of planning, implementation, monitoring, assessment, evaluation and wind-up of a research project. The requirement for community consent is distinct from the obligation of researchers to obtain individual consent from research participants. (p. 18)

Obtaining collective consent is one of the ways to respect Indigenous values. After obtaining conditional ethics approval from the university, I proceeded to develop relationships with the education director of the communities I thought I could work with.

Each community had its own process for research. For example, in one community I had to fill out more forms for their own ethics committee to reject or approve my research. I followed their guidelines, obtained their collective approval for this research, and then obtained full ethical approval from the university. I also followed the community leaders' guidelines regarding approaching the schools. In one school, I was asked to present the proposed research project at a staff meeting. I liked that as it was a chance for me to meet people and for the staff to get to know me and to ask questions. Grounding the research in Indigenous epistemology is another way to decolonize the methodology.

3.2.3 Indigenous epistemology.

Indigenous epistemology involves structures of relationships and structures of knowledge (Wilson, 2008). The relationships that enable researchers to construct knowledge, concepts, or ideas are more important than knowledge, concepts, or ideas themselves. Wilson (2008) specified what the word ‘relationships’ means within an Indigenous epistemology: “They [relationships] include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships with ideas” (p. 74). This definition of relationship means a lot of reflecting, a lot of discussions, and many hours spent with pertinent ideas in order to let questions stem from these ideas until the relationships between ideas and concepts are clearer.

The Aboriginal Education Research Centre (2007) has adopted Ermine’s (1999) definition of Indigenous epistemology:

Aboriginal epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown. Understanding of the universe must be grounded in the spirit. Knowledge must be sought through the stream of the inner space in unison with all instruments of knowing and conditions that make individuals receptive to knowing. Ultimately it was in the self that Aboriginal people discovered great resources for coming to grips with life’s mysteries. It was in the self that the richest source of information could be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origin of knowledge. Aboriginal epistemology speaks of pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self (p. 108).

In both definitions, relationships—including relationship with the self—are central to Indigenous epistemology. As such, relationships are also central to Indigenous methodologies. By putting relationships at the heart of a way of knowing, the research relationships become the most important factor in the research project. This means that interpretations must be respectful and supportive of relationships and results must be

helpful to the Indigenous communities (Wilson, 2008). In this study, Indigenous epistemology also shaped how I chose and applied the methodologies.

3.2.4 Indigenous research methodologies.

Kovach (2010a) defined Indigenous methodologies as a holistic process that stems from and is led by an Indigenous knowledge paradigm or Indigenous epistemology. Wilson (2008) added that Indigenous methodologies include Indigenous values and beliefs, along with cultural protocols. From an Indigenous perspective, a methodology cannot be objective or detached from the relationships that are created between researcher and participants. Smith (1999) stressed the same point by saying that one must understand Indigenous life in order to understand Indigenous methodologies.

Indigenous research methods must be aligned with the context of the study and findings need to integrate the context of the study (Birks & Mills, 2011). Birks and Mills (2011) also stated that grounded theory can be used in an Indigenous study, but only within a context where the end product is “to be grounded in the substantive area of enquiry” (p 169). Wilson (2008) echoed the same idea, although not referring specifically to grounded theory but to research in general. He stated that ultimately the goal is not about the findings the research will bring but rather the change that this new knowledge will generate. Research is futile or unethical if it does not improve the existence of the participants. Wulff (2010) specified that “Indigenous research must make a difference in people’s lives, not as an afterthought or as a separate applied step, but as a function of the entire research process” (p. 1291). My findings can make a difference in First Nations communities, as they stress the importance of cultural identity when it comes to holding

high expectations, creating effective learning environments, and building trusting relationships with parents, families, and the community. These components are essential to closing the achievement gap. Indigenous leaders and educators can lean on my findings to acquire funding in areas such as curriculum development, effective parental involvement, creating culturally safe environments, and culturally responsive pedagogy.

Another essential point about Indigenous methodologies lies in the relationships between researcher and participants, as I explained in the Indigenous epistemology section. Wulff (2010) wrote, “Relationships are fundamental to the Indigenous way of living and working in the word” (p. 1292). He added that this can be problematic for Western research paradigms, which view the person as an individual first and foremost. Kovach (2010b) argued that the *relational* is central to Indigenous methodologies because of Indigenous worldviews. She also talked about the relationship to self as being important in honouring Indigenous methodologies: “Critically reflective self-location is a strategy to keep us aware of the power dynamic flowing back and forth between researcher and participant. It prompts awareness of the extractive tendency of research. And it endorses tending to the personal and cultural in research” (p. 112). Part of tending to the personal in research is seeking to understand one’s motivation and purpose behind every step of the research. This helps make the research transparent, which is a strong Indigenous value.

In the first chapter I explained that my motivation lay discovering an unknown world barely an hour from my home. I have since realized how systematic structures have kept us apart; my Canada is not the Canada I believed it to be. I want to contribute to

reconciliation between peoples by offering First Nations education leaders findings that can lead to positive changes in the education system. I also want to help Settlers understand why our current system is not working for too many First Nations families. I want to suggest changes to policies and professional development for teachers. Although most Settlers I speak to are horrified by the impact of residential schools, they seem too often to want to rush in with a solution that makes sense only in a Western world, without taking the time to learn to see through an Indigenous cultural lens.

The *cultural* in research refers to one's engagement with the culture studied, whether one is an Indigenous researcher or a non-Indigenous researcher. Indigenous methodologies may refer to cultural foundation in a specific or general manner. This cultural foundation should infuse the research in a way that is coherent with the researcher's relationship with said culture (Kovach, 2010b). This is why I could not ignore all the participants who spoke about different aspects of Indigenous culture in their interviews, even if it had not been part of my original questions.

Indigenous methodologies must also include decolonizing perspectives (Smith, 2005). This means the study must focus on "centering our [Aboriginal] concerns and worldviews and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our perspectives and for our own purposes" (p. 39). Bainbridge, in Birks & Mills, (2011), added that decolonizing methodologies must have the appropriate elements to build "knowledge that has relevance, practical application and vision for Aboriginal people" (p. 170). Kovach (2010b) added advice for non-Indigenous researchers wanting to do research in an Aboriginal decolonizing context: it is essential to have Indigenous people involved in the

research. It is also important that the researcher have both practical and scholarly knowledge of Indigenous knowledge.

Conceptual research frameworks or research designs are meant to describe the thinking or the paradigm that drives the research process and the interpretation of findings. But these frameworks or designs also become an instrument for researchers to verify that their methods are aligned with a particular epistemology. Kovach (2009) questioned whether language such as “frameworks” will erode the Indigenous philosophies. At the same time, she acknowledged that frameworks can help guide Indigenous researchers by identifying three aspects of Indigenous research: “a) the cultural knowledges that guide one’s research; b) the methods used in searching; and c) a way to interpret knowledge so as to give it back in a purposeful, helpful and relevant manner” (p. 43). In her own doctoral study, she developed a research framework with Nêhiyaw epistemology. She designed this framework to make it easy to transfer to non-Indigenous researchers. Because of the details this Cree researcher has incorporated in her design, and because it stems from a deep understanding of Indigenous epistemology, I chose to study her research design in depth. I also chose her design because I see the parts fitting very well into my own research design.

Kovach’s design has six parts, which she presented in a circle with epistemology at the center (p. 45).



Figure 2. Kovach's (2009) Research Design

In this case, the epistemology stemmed from the Cree's relation to knowledge. This means that at the core of this research lies recognition of and respect for the Cree people and their way of knowing. It also means that the researcher is an ally and will not harm the community. There is a form of community accountability. Finally, having the epistemology in the center indicates that the research will be beneficial for the community. This research design indicates acknowledgment of Cree ways of knowing.

Embedded in that design are both researcher and research preparations. *Researcher preparations* include a self-reflection on one's own experiences. Self-reflection is also part of grounded theory methodology; Kovach (2009) stated that reflexivity is not new to research but that in her framework, it takes more space. In Indigenous epistemology self-

reflection is always a necessary component; it is never optional. This step is also an invitation to reflect on insider/outsider status and the preparation needed to do the research honourably. It is during this step that a researcher needs to know clearly what personal and academic motivations will guide the process. Kovach's explanation of reflexivity therefore goes deeper than the concept of reflexivity as stated in grounded theory literature, where it is more a question of identifying how one's experiences and perceptions will impact interpretations.

Research preparations encompass the choices that will lead to findings. This step includes details on data collection, participant selection, the process that will guide the interpretation, and how findings will be presented. For Kovach's research, she also included *tâpwê*—truth and trust (p. 51).

In my own research journey along with the participants, I discovered an appropriate research design that reflected the trusting and respectful research relationship that I and the participants built. I had many discussions with education leaders, teachers, and elders—discussions that went beyond simply doing an interview.

3.3 Grounded Theory Studies in an Indigenous Context

Most grounded theory studies (and other Western qualitative methodologies) in Indigenous contexts share one concern: the concept of formal research is in itself a Western concept (Foley, 2003; Birks & Mills, 2011; Lavallée, 2009). Integrating Indigenous methodologies into a Western qualitative methodology is one way to bridge

Western practices and Indigenous understandings. Reading on Indigenous methodologies often leads to new epistemology.

Wilson (2008) supported the idea that it is not the method or methodology itself that is a characteristic of Indigenous methods or methodologies, but rather the relationship between the method and the Indigenous worldview or paradigm and whether or not the method is coherent with this worldview. In the next section, I describe studies that have chosen grounded theory as a methodology and, at the same time, have been able to infuse Indigenous worldviews into their design.

Bainbridge, in Birks & Mills (2011), argued that Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing guided her research process and practice of constructivist grounded theory. She felt it was “an integration of Aboriginal and Western knowledge to facilitate a culturally safe and respectful and scientifically rigorous development of social science theory” (p. 171). Bainbridge wanted to develop a theory of Aboriginal women’s agency in contemporary Australian society. She argued that grounded theory was the best methodology to use to develop a practical theory. She infused the grounded theory model with an Indigenous epistemology, thus helping to ensure that Aboriginal concerns and perspectives were at the core of the process.

Dylan, Regehr, and Alaggia (2008) used unstructured interviews, theoretical sampling, parallel data analysis, and axial coding in a Canadian study of First Nations victims of sexual violence. These researchers said that using essential techniques of grounded theory

respected the oral tradition of First Nations, while providing findings that were practical and scientifically sound.

In a pilot study of support required by non-Indigenous faculty to integrate and enhance Indigenous knowledges within course content at the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, Kovach (2010b) described the conversational method as a way of gathering data while grounded theory was used to analyze the data and organize the findings. Kovach (2010b) argued that using grounded theory helped “build theory on infusing Indigenous knowledges into core academic curriculum” (p. 46). She also argued that grounded theory helped her organize the data in a way that respected confidentiality.

Maar et al. (2011) employed some elements of grounded theory while conducting a study on Manitoulin Island (Ontario) on the challenges to evidence-based self-management behaviours and education. They wanted to understand the perspectives of Aboriginal people living with Type 2 diabetes and the perspectives of their health care providers. They used grounded theory methodology to analyse transcripts from focus group interviews. They also used triangulation to validate findings.

Integrating Indigenous methodologies into grounded theory can lead to stronger, more culturally helpful findings. Denzin (2010) argued that grounded theory is the most influential model of theory construction used in qualitative studies in the social sciences today. He went on to say that a dialogue between grounded, critical and Indigenous theories would contribute to stronger qualitative studies. He argued that by merging theories from different worldviews and paradigms, research can finally develop a

structure for sociological theorizing and practice that will help advance the goals of justice and equity. When reflecting upon Denzin's ideas and on the other researchers' logic, I saw the pertinence of using a research design built on both grounded theory and Indigenous methodologies.

3.4 Research Design

Battiste (2007) stated that research carries a collective responsibility and must safeguard against exploitation of First Nations people and their knowledges. Kovach (2009) wrote about "the relevance of being holistically true to one's worldview" (p. 120) in reference to situating oneself and one's purpose within a research study. Kovach reflected on Cam Willet's views on methodologies, agreeing that a chosen epistemology must reflect one's general life choices, not just in research. She said that Western universities too often convey the message that one can choose a methodology in relation to a research question only, without reflecting on the self. This is not the case in Indigenous methodologies.

Writing this dissertation led me to a lot of reflection. I often had to pause and contemplate my memo readings (observations or interviews) and document reading while listening again to interviews. What did the words I was reading or hearing mean for me, both as a person and as a researcher? I questioned my own knowledge of *expectations* and parental involvement, which had been framed by Western research. Those questions, along with the different answers participants offered when talking about expectations in relation to school, led me to the core of this research: a common understanding of the purpose of education is key to defining expectations. While it might be difficult for all stakeholders

to understand the purpose of education in exactly the same way, it is essential to actively work toward deepening our collective understanding of the purpose of education.

I have carefully reflected on the guidelines Indigenous researchers provide to non-Indigenous researchers (Kovach, 2010b; First Nations Centre des Premières Nations, 2007). The more I immersed myself in Indigenous cultural activities, committees, conferences, and readings in parallel with ongoing relationships, the more I believed that I could contribute to a process and to practical knowledge that will generate potentially useful actions for First Nations children and their communities. My work journey has brought me to this place. I will keep following this path in a respectful manner, knowing that I am not simply a graduate student in a university context, but a student of a complex and contradictory cultural reality. I have tried to use a linguistic code that politicians and education leaders will understand so they can create an equitable and fair Canadian society for each of our children.

Fully recognizing the limits of my own Settler worldviews, even as I immerse myself in First Nations culture and literature, I acknowledge that I interpreted the findings first through my own lens at each stage of coding. For that reason, I continued to seek First Nations interpretations of my findings. I adjusted accordingly. I am aware that my findings are an offering, not a certainty. It is up to First Nations educational leaders and communities to decide the worthiness of these findings.

I mostly followed grounded theory methodology but I infused it with Indigenous methodologies. In Table 7 I explain the similarities between the methodologies. I then

present the actions I undertook within the integrated design that guided my research. For example, in Indigenous methodologies, relationships are key, even before starting the research. This is one area of focus that I respected.

Table 7. *Indigenous and Western Research Design*

Indigenous Methodologies (Kovach)	Grounded Theory
Researcher preparation	
Research preparation	Literature review
Decolonizing and ethics	Self-reflection
Gathering knowledge	Collecting data
Making meaning	Theoretical sampling/Analyzing data
Giving back	Sharing data
Epistemology (at centre of methodologies)	Epistemology (frames methodology)

The following list specifies my actions within an integrated research design.

Researcher preparation

- I fostered relationships with communities by attending Pow wows and Aboriginal day celebrations, and by buying art from local artists. In the schools, I spoke to staff members who did not participate in the research.
- I recognized the limitations of my interpretations and presented interpretations to education leaders, elders, and other participants.
- I discovered my own personal and academic motivations, which took me on a personal journey of healing.
- I kept learning about Indigenous communities and education (reading research and local articles, and conversing with elders, First Nations scholars, and community leaders) about the history of the communities where I conducted research.

Research preparation

- I included a detailed Indigenous methodologies section in my proposal and kept it in my dissertation.
- My literature review included research in Indigenous contexts.
- I selected participant educators in collaboration with Indigenous education directors and school principals. I selected participant parents and caregivers in collaboration with the culture teacher in one school and with the liaison teacher in the other school. These two Indigenous teachers were key in leading me to a stronger understanding of the community and the school.
- I participated during the research and on an ongoing basis in events that relate to Indigenous culture and education.

Decolonizing and ethics

- I obtained ethics approval from the university.
- I followed each community's guidelines for obtaining collective consent. One community had a structured research committee that approved any research in the community in order to protect the collective well-being of their people. This meant I needed to provide more information than the university's ethics board required. The other community gave collective consent through the chief and leaders of the domain studied.
- I obtained individual consent from adults and parental consent for class observations.
- I followed Indigenous protocols, such as offering tobacco to one elder and offering

lunch to another. I gave books to the parents who participated and the Wabanki collection to the classes I observed.

- I presented myself. Unfortunately, I only learned to do this later in the process. In later interviews, I learned to explain my family's cultural background and ask about theirs at the beginning of a first conversation, as per their traditions for introduction.
- I included elders in the triangulation to validate my interpretation.

Methods for collecting data

- Semi-structured individual interviews (28)
- Semi-structured group conversations (2)
- Observations (21)
- Document analysis (e.g., school policies, newsletters)
- Memo writing (reflections, questions, and some tentative analysis)

Analyzing to make meaning

- I followed the three phases of coding in the analysis.
- Throughout the processes, I had conversations with some Indigenous participants and elders. I read more research to complete cycle of data gathering.
- I validated my interpretations with First Nations education leaders.

Giving back

- I will offer teacher learning based on my research during a professional development day at each school, as per discussion with education directors.
- I will be available to present results to the two education entities in New Brunswick:

Three Nations and FNEII.

- I will continue to participate in community events.

Epistemology

- Interactionism, Constructivism, and Indigenous epistemology.
- Returning often to epistemologies to let them guide research practices.

At the end of my research journey, I will continue to develop this research design for use in future projects. I will also continue discussions with First Nations community members, First Nations school leaders, and scholars. This will help me continue to broaden my understandings. I will also continue to foster the relationships that are embedded in my work. I will keep being active in Indigenous cultural life and treaty education, whether or not my professional life leads me to more involvement with Indigenous peoples.

3.4.1 Relevance of the study.

Using the constructs that were validated during the process of analysis, I have developed a conceptual framework of cultural capital elements that are expected to be present and could lead to student success. This conceptual framework provides a comprehensive understanding of how achievement expectations are understood by Indigenous leaders, educators, parents and caregivers, and non-Indigenous teachers who work in a band-operated school. It articulates how these expectations are woven into cultural expectations. I had intended to focus on two aspects of cultural capital—literacy habits

and parental involvement (parent-school and parent-child) —as these aspects seem to matter most when it comes to educational outcomes (Bodovski, 2010; Covay & Carbonaro, 2010). But participants told me loud and clear that they also wanted to talk about expectations regarding culture and about learning environments. Through the different phases of analysis, it became clear that elders, parents, and caregivers had expectations regarding the purpose of education that were different from the system's and the educators' expectations and standards. Moreover, some educators felt a tension between the system's expectations and their own expectations. Therefore, I also made the purpose of education part of the results, as an expectation gap regarding the purpose of education does not allow for alignment of cultural capital, which is a condition for achievement. In other words, instead of just limiting my findings to cultural capital elements, I let the participants guide the shaping of the conceptual framework, which I called an *Education Success Map*.

The theoretical and academic contribution of this work builds on well-researched sociological and educational concepts. This research is original in that it breaks barriers by addressing questions regarding a well-known driver of achievement (expectations) and embedding it in social reproduction theory. Using a theory that assumes variation in social and cultural resources and practices allows me to move away from stereotyping Indigenous communities toward an understanding of how perceptions and observed actions shape expectations.

I have chosen to present my findings in a conceptual framework for both pedagogical and policy-related purposes with the aim of supporting First Nations children in their school

journey. The conceptual framework can inform professional development for teachers working in First Nations schools and in public schools. It is a guide for developing culturally responsive pedagogical approaches and practices and building more effective relationships with parents, families, and community. It can also inform new policy by providing a deeper understanding of how drivers of educational achievement, such as expectations, fit within an adapted cultural capital framework in a First Nations context. Finally, increased consciousness of the power of perceptions linked to expectations and cultural capital can help parents and communities better advocate for their children within and outside of the community—in band-operated schools and in provincial schools—should they choose to do so.

First Nations children deserve a strong education context. The achievement gap needs to be closed. A better understanding of the cultural capital that children bring with them to school can help create classrooms that fit their learning needs within a learning context where high expectations are upheld for each learner. Expectations shape how teachers see children and their families, and these perceptions in turn shape their pedagogical actions. A fuller understanding of expectations will help guide professional development for teaching First Nations children in a context that respects their identity. My research has created tools to actualize the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015) report's recommendations.

Chapter Four: Findings

With this study I wanted to gain insight into how teachers understand the cultural capital that First Nations parents transfer to their children, and how their understanding affects teachers' practices, especially practices linked to academic expectations. I also wanted to know about the spaces that are created to cultivate teachers' understandings of and actions upon cultural capital. I initially targeted literacy and parental involvement as concepts of cultural capital and expectations because research has demonstrated that these aspects make a difference when it comes to student success, regardless of ethnicity. I conducted and analyzed 21 classroom observations in three classrooms (Grades 2 and 3), 28 individual semi-structured interviews, and two group interviews in two band-operated schools. In total, I interviewed 32 participants. I asked each participant a general question regarding expectations: What are your expectations regarding your students or your child or the community's children when they go to school? I also asked general questions regarding literacy habits, parental involvement, and teacher education. I conducted my analysis using a cultural capital lens. I analyzed documents, observations, and memos to determine categories and sub-categories. Throughout this process I compared my findings with the literature and validated findings with elders and other participants. As results for this research lead to the same conclusions regardless of the school, in presenting the findings I do not often differentiate between schools unless it is pertinent. This choice protects confidentiality.

As is often the case in grounded and Indigenous methodologies, the data led to evolving categories and new categories. Parental involvement evolved to family and community involvement, and literacy habits became a sub-category of academics. Learning environment and purpose of education emerged as new categories.

Culture also emerged as a new category even though I did not ask a specific question regarding culture. In semi-structured interviews (Bernard, 1988), my role was to follow where the participants took me. Instead of making *culture* a separate category, my last analysis led me to integrate the theme of culture across all other categories. Having a category that becomes a finding that is intertwined with other categories sometimes makes findings truer to participants' voices (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although not part of my questions, almost every conversation, every observation, and most document analysis led to some thoughts on culture. This led me to determine that culture should not be absent from any discussion, study, policy writing, or teacher learning when it comes to Indigenous education. Not only should it not be left out, it should be woven into everything, from teacher education to classroom learning, from relationships with parents and the community to learning environments.

In the next sections I describe my findings in relation to the categories that emerged from this study: Purpose of education, Family and community, Academics, and Learning environment. The last three categories also have subcategories that I present and discuss in their respective sections. The category *culture* is woven throughout these categories, as elders, some educators, caregivers, and parents thought culture should be infused in everything in school. It should be the foundation of their education structure. I also

examine each category under the lens of cultural capital theory. At the end of this chapter I propose a conceptual framework—the *Education Success Map*—that draws on findings from this research.

4.1 Purpose of Education

The participants in this study believed that education is important in order to foster each child's success in life and contribute to the community's development and prosperity. My findings show that the entry point for understanding the purpose of education is not the same for all Indigenous people and that these different points of view are not based on social class. Understanding these differences is key to fostering each child's success because cultural capital theory makes a case that school success gaps are present because parents and families transfer to their children different attitudes, skills, values, and ways of knowing and being. In this study, these differences are even wider than when they are based on social class, because some middle-class families or leaders did not adhere to the school's standards and expectations. When there is no common understanding of education, people cannot work towards common goals and expectations. In this section I explain my findings regarding the purpose of education.

4.1.1 Tensions regarding the purpose of education.

Education is a priority for Indigenous peoples. However, my findings show that the legacy of the residential schools and the lack of Indigenous approaches and content in today's schools mean that many Indigenous people see school as a symbol of assimilation. My data show that many Indigenous parents or caregivers feel a tension;

while they want their children to go to school and succeed, at the same time they want to distance themselves from schooling.

For example, one middle-class Indigenous mother stated that she does not do homework with her young children. She added that she would help if they asked but “it’s their responsibility to come to me with that, so I’ve never really gotten on that homework train with them.” This mother said she often tells her children, “just get through high school, and then become somebody of yourself.” This professional mother recognized the value of education as offering more choices in life, but did not feel it was her responsibility to accompany her children when it comes to formal education, as do middle-class parents who practice concerted cultivation. She spoke of her own schooling career, which was full of bullying incidents. Her main expectation was that her children have a “good day,” which she defined as her daughter coming home from school smiling as opposed to crying.

One grandmother who is also a caregiver for her grandchild stated that she expected her grandchildren “to accomplish more than they can here, as much as possible, especially with our culture, and then move on to other things.” Like the mother at the beginning of this section, the “move on to other things” makes it sound like school is a difficult but necessary chore to get *through* as oppose to an enjoyable learning experience. This grandmother, who is middle-class, talked about culture when expressing her expectations of school.

An Indigenous educator was aligned with that thinking. When talking about her community, this person said, “A lot of them, education doesn't mean anything to them because they survived it ... And there's other ones here, education is everything.” The idea that school is something unpleasant for many people is very present.

All three elders explained how the purpose of education seemed to be too much about academics and not enough about culture. They said school is still dividing families and the community. They stated that more culture would help children achieve, while bringing families and the community closer to their own identity and closer to the school. One elder said she never did homework with her children or grandchildren. She did read them bedtime stories—mostly Indigenous books when she could find them—and shared her people’s stories. She stated that literacy is very important in life. But she felt school learnings should be done at school and at school only because “by the time they get out, by the time you get them, and you get them home, it’s time for the supper. After the supper, they’re supposed to do their homework, and then you don’t have them at all, all week. Only on weekends if you’re lucky.” In her comment is the idea that school takes children away from their family, an echo of what happened during the residential school period. This elder insisted that school education should be more about relationships. To accomplish that, teachers needed to understand the families and the community. She also said that much more outdoor education was needed so children would understand their relationship to nature and because children need to explore and be outside if they are to be happier and successful with their learning.

Another elder thought that school as it is now is too much about subjects such as math and science, and not enough about honouring the child's identity: "I can see where the flaws are in that disruption scale where they're not proud of who they are." She stated firmly that there needs to be more culture, more ceremony, more about their relationships and responsibilities regarding nature, and more language teaching if the children are to know who they are and consequently to meet academic expectations. She found that her own grandchildren resisted speaking their native language once they were in school because even the band-operated school emphasized learning English language and learning through the English language as opposed to celebrating and learning not only the Indigenous language, but the teachings and relationships embedded in the language itself. Unfortunately, at school, "the language is considered a topic, a subject."

She said she used to tell her granddaughter stories in her own language, even when using an English book. Then one day, when her little one was in pre-kindergarten, "she brought home a book for me to read from school, she sat on my lap, and I'm reading to her in the language, and she's going: 'that's not the story.' So, what she was realizing was the teacher reads it differently ... She wanted to hear it the way the teacher wanted to hear it. So, I lost my battle (referring to teaching her the language)."

An interview with a third elder led to me to understand that the purpose of school should be about academic success but not at the price of losing one's identity and culture. He stated that the students "should be in an environment where their culture is promoted, where their culture is valued, and where they're encouraged to embrace the teachings of

our ancestors, the teachings and the traditions, as well as the ceremonies, and of course language is important in this process.”

Although he stated that he was impressed by what some community and public schools are doing regarding culture, he said it is not enough. Most band-operated schools and public schools are willing to introduce “superficial changes, such as having, for example, like a traditional feast or having teachers do a village, a First Nations village. So, these are all superficial initiatives. They have to go deeper than having those superficial activities, and going through the core of the Mi'kmaq Wolastoqey cultures, which of course would mean the language, the spirituality, and then of course the belief systems, the philosophies of our ancestors, the knowledge systems of our ancestors, that has to be ... They have to be acknowledged and recognized as valid sources of information, first of all, and not only that, but also as valued, valid, valued aspects of the curriculum.” He believed that the public education system is still very colonial, as the provincial curricula and teaching approaches are used in band-operated schools. These last two elders shared the word in their language for education: *Wolokehkitimok*. This word means that teaching and learning are interwoven. Teachers must teach to spirit, heart, body and mind of the child, while also learning from the spirit, heart, body, and mind of the child. In other words, holistic teaching and learning—*wolokehkitasit*—should be the teaching approach that is prevalent in an Indigenous classroom.

An Indigenous educator also felt that culture should be integrated into every aspect of education. The cultural teacher should participate at every case conference in order to look at problems from the very important angle of culture rather than basing decisions on

data, behaviour, and academics. Another Indigenous education leader felt that although more work needed to be done, the cultural ways of being were being integrated in the school, which made it more welcoming to families.

Another Indigenous educator articulated very clearly what she thought the purpose of school should be: “We want two things for our kids ... really strong literacy and numeracy skills, but of equal, if not greater importance in some regards simply because we’re a little bit further behind in that, is a strong cultural foundation, and a real sense of pride in who they are and where they come from.” This educator’s position is aligned with the elders’: Culture needs to be woven into the very core of the education that children get in schools.

However, not everybody felt that culture is important or that it should be different in a band-operated school. A mother from a vulnerable context stated: “He [her son] doesn’t like language class. He doesn’t understand the culture. The people here are divided. Some think it isn’t important and they should be learning more reading and math. I don’t get involved in those discussions.” The mention of “those discussions” seems to indicate that the purpose of education is being discussed among families. It also points to the absence of a commonly-understood purpose.

Another Indigenous educator who works closely with families stated, “I would really hope that I can get kids and parents to understand the importance of education. I get slammed in my face it’s a white system. I understand that, but it’s a system that they need to make it anywhere in life right now.” She added that for many people school is not a

good experience, that White people structured it to assimilate them, and that it is not culturally adequate. Another educator echoed this remark and felt the education system did not respect Indigenous culture, even in a band-operated school. He explained that people were divided: Some embraced education, while others said it is “whitewashing.” If there are differences regarding the purpose of education among the Indigenous participants in this study, there is also no common understanding of education among Settler educators, as the following examples show.

A Settler staff member thought band-operated school should be more about behavior and less about curricula, but she never mentioned culture.

Throughout her interview, another non-Indigenous staff member affirmed that schools should be about developing strong academic skills, giving students tools to succeed at the band-operated school, at the high school, and then in post-secondary education institutes. She did not mention culture other than to say that schools should not be segregated into Anglophone, Francophone, and band-operated schools. She thought there should just be one school for everybody.

On the other hand, two Settler educators stated that all New Brunswick students need to learn the history, as they themselves were very shocked at how little they knew about Indigenous culture and history before teaching in a band-operated school. Both these teachers thought more culture should be integrated into education in the school.

Even a person who says culture is important and is aware that culture should be part of education may act in ways that contradict that belief. For example, I observed how one

Indigenous educator who expressed strong feelings about wanting more native language at school corrected her students back to English when they slipped a word from their native language into a sentence. This seems to be a result of the tension between personal beliefs and the school standards and expectations. This teacher confirmed that she wanted children to have strong English skills to succeed, as the children at this school had low vocabulary skills, according to evaluation that had been conducted the previous year. Her (Western) teacher education was at times stronger than her thoughts on language and culture, especially in a context where academic achievement is the predominant expectation in curricula and in the school plan.

In total, 15 of the 20 educators, including eight Indigenous participants, mentioned culture and language as being an important part of education in school. It is important for me to mention this high percentage of cultural references because none of my questions dealt directly with culture. Nevertheless, the participants, including elders, wanted to talk about culture and they found a way to talk about it. This finding demonstrates that education and culture are difficult to disassociate in an Indigenous school context. The following is a summary of how educators mentioned culture. They mostly talked about what it should be and not necessarily as it was presently. They mentioned that culture

- helps create stronger relationships with parents and community (three participants)
- develops strong values and self-esteem (four participants)
- enhances learning, both because the students know who they are and because it informs teaching approaches, like including outdoor education (three participants)

- is embedded in the language and that language needs to be taught (five participants)

One of these participants thought all teachers should know at least a few words in the Indigenous language (e.g., how to greet children and parents, ask how they are, and say a few words linked to a lesson they are teaching). Three participants also talked about culture from teacher's point of view, stating that teachers are now better informed about residential schools and Indigenous culture. They said there seems to be more respect for the culture and less stereotyping. This awareness could contribute to having a commonly-understood and respected purpose of education that included culture.

Six of the nine parents and caregivers talked about culture as a value in the band-operated school. One of those parents said that the subject of culture at school divided the community. The other five parents and caregivers all spoke of how pleased they were with the school because there was more and more culture. Two of those parents said they had chosen the band-operated school because their child would not get culture in public school. One parent said she regretted just knowing a few words in her language, but she did teach those words to her children. Two parents added that immersion in their Indigenous language should be available for their children. One reflected, "I really would love to see more, more of an immersion going on here ... it's their identity ... And if you don't have that ... Your self-esteem won't be as high."

All these statements lead to the finding that the purpose of education is not commonly understood, although the fact that there is more culture seems to be added value for many parents and caregivers, and a necessity for many educators and for the elders. Two

educators and one parent talked about how education divides their community because on the one hand it is seen as a White system, while on the other hand some parents want more academics. These strong thoughts regarding culture are important. In total, 24 out of 32 participants found a way to incorporate culture and language into our conversations. This led me to analyze documents to see what was said about culture.

My analysis of school policies, school reports, and memos to parents and caregivers revealed that there is no policy or mission statement that clearly defines the purpose of education as being both academic and cultural. Other than one statement saying staff and students must be respectful during opening prayers, there is nothing to support what the elders said. Elders in this study stated clearly that educators or the school should also be responsible either for teaching cultural ways of knowing and ways of being or for regularly inviting knowledge keepers and elders to teach.

Despite my participants' assertions regarding culture in the schools, as I analyzed the school plans I saw that culture is indeed included. In one plan the goal is "to encourage and support our students to become knowledgeable of their language, history and culture." While the school was conducting some cultural activities, it was not integrating the strategies into curriculum, subjects, or teaching practices, except for one strategy that spoke to outdoor education. The outdoor education strategy was a pilot project for kindergarten. In the other school plan, strategies in literacy, science, and retention included strong cultural aspects. However, in the Professional Learning Community (PLC) sheets that were handed out to teaching staff, the cultural aspects were absent; the PLC sheets only included the academic domains (i.e., literacy and numeracy). Even if

culture was part of the school plans, it did not seem to trickle all the way down to the classroom as a foundation for teaching and learning at the time of this study. Educators and parents do not appear to share a commonly-understood purpose of education.

Arriving at a common purpose of education cannot be done without strong relationships and trusting dialogues between families, community, and educators. In the next section I describe findings regarding family and community involvement.

4.2 Family and Community Involvement

In my literature review, parental involvement was one aspect of cultural capital that was demonstrated to have a positive impact on school success regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic context. I therefore asked a specific question regarding parental involvement in my interviews. It quickly became apparent that the word “parent” was not representative of this study’s context. Rather, my findings showed that family and community involvement are a better expression of what is important for the Indigenous schools involved in this research.

The literature I reviewed indicated that strong relationships between families and school need to be built upon respect for the community and a strong sense of belonging within the school, especially where there is a history of mistrust. My findings demonstrate that relationships between communities and schools are presently not strong enough to generate that strong sense of belonging. The legacy of the residential schools, mistrust, and what one participant called “cultural gap misunderstandings” between non-Indigenous educators and some families, create unique barriers.

My findings led me to create two sub-categories regarding family and community involvement: Trust and involvement, and Use of language. I explain the findings regarding these sub-categories in the following sections.

4.2.1 Trust and involvement.

Nearly every participant did not perceive schools to be trusting and thriving places for too many members of the communities. At the same time, all 32 participants recognized the importance of parental involvement and trusting communication with parents and caregivers.

Three Indigenous mothers stated that they were more actively involved in their child's schooling and school activity with their youngest child. All three of these mothers had had their first child when they were young; two were 18 years old and the other did not specify her age but said she was young. It is interesting to note that as young mothers, they were in a vulnerable context. What all three women had in common is that they had a postsecondary education degree or diploma and were working by the time they had their youngest child, which changed their socioeconomic status from vulnerable to middle-class. Of the other six parents or caregivers who participated in this study, two were in a vulnerable context and the others were middle class.

The mother from a vulnerable context talked to teachers when she came to pick up her child at school but did not participate often in school-organized activities. She said she was happy with the way the school was communicating with her, through informal meetings in the hallway. Two other parents were also satisfied with communication. One

middle-class parent said the teacher texted when she had not read a notice from the school saying school was finishing early a certain day, for example. But does this also mean that this parent does not read the notices sent home? The first parent read the notices sent by the school. Neither of these parents attended information sessions or other activities organized by the school. The middle-class parent stated: “They try to get parents involved.” She added, talking about school activities: “They do like ... community assemblies ... There’s no parents that show up.” Although she was middle-class, her perception and expectations were that parents are not that interested.

Another parent, from a vulnerable context, stated, “They try to get parents involved, and I attended one of them (teacher and parents meetings), but I was surprised to see that when I attended this ... there was not very much parents and just more teachers, so I kind of felt uncomfortable.” The “teachers” here refers to teachers who are also parents. This parent felt that only educated parents attended these meetings.

Different perceptions led to non-participation. The middle-class parent who did not attend activities said at the end of the interview, “I’d like to see more parental involvement, but same time, I still have that same feeling of ... [being bullied in public school as a student]. When I get home, I’m exhausted.” Even though she was a professional and was too young to have attended residential school, this parent was still healing from her own experiences of racism at school, which she had described earlier in the interview. School was not a safe place for her. She was one of the parents who stated that the most important thing for her was that her daughter had a good day at school (i.e., coming home

not crying). She was very satisfied with her daughter's present Indigenous teacher, who texted her regularly to tell her how her daughter was doing at school.

In total, seven parents in this study said they regularly participated in school events, but they said that many parents or community members did not participate. One of these parents specified that the community and parents came when it was a cultural event, like the mini Pow wow. These events also included food, and that, she said, always brings people in.

Two parents talked about a Facebook group that was always saying negative things about the school. This influenced communication in a negative way as parents got information from Facebook instead of calling the school to know what was really happening. A caregiver said parents did not come to parent-teacher meetings because they did not understand what the teachers were saying; the teachers used fancy words. Another parent stated that most parents and caregivers were more concerned about behaviour. They did not want their children to be bullied so they were not really listening to academic things, but instead wanted to know about the behaviour of others towards their children. A grandmother thought parental involvement should be up to the parents and people should not judge if they chose not to participate, even though she personally felt that parental involvement was important. She spoke of parental involvement as participating in school-based events.

The parents in this study were aware that activities at the school were not necessarily something that all parents attended in their communities, that there was organized

resistance against the school in some instances (e.g., the Facebook group), and that many students were lost to public school. While all parents in this study were aware that the school sent newsletters, they believed that many parents neither read the newsletters nor looked at the schools' websites. Even the fact that the parents agreed to do an interview with me is telling. Except for two participants, the parents and caregivers who accepted to participate in this study were parents who participated regularly in school events or meetings.

I participated in two mini Pow wows, one at each school. There were grandparents and some parents in attendance. One principal shared that more parents should have come. The teachers, both Indigenous and Settler, participated in the dances and encouraged the students to participate. I witnessed a lot of joy at these mini Pow wows, along with pride from the students who danced and drummed. I also participated at an end-of-year awards ceremony at one school. There were many parents, families, and caregivers at this event. From my observations, the parents and grandparents who were there seemed pleased to be attending.

The educators also talked about parental and community involvement and communication. Educators mentioned that schools send newsletters home regularly and post activities on their websites. Educators generally agreed that most parents and caregivers do not read newsletters. Eleven educators stated that one-on-one communication works better. These educators talked about face-to-face structured meetings, talking to parents when they drop off their children, making home visits, telephoning, or text messaging. Educators also mentioned that some parents did not

answer when they saw that it was the school calling, some telephones were disconnected, and some children were now living somewhere else, which made it difficult to communicate with parents or caregivers.

A Settler educator said, “One of our biggest battles is having the parents come in and get involved and wanting to know what we’re doing, you know, be interested in ... I always have an open-door concept, like let me know, you’re more than welcome.” Another educator, also non-Indigenous, said that he used to invite parents but now he doesn’t bother because they just do not come. One Indigenous educator thought the school was doing really well, as they sent out newsletter regularly. For these three educators, the school was being pro-active in communicating with parents. They saw it as the parents’ responsibility to communicate back.

Two Indigenous educators talked about how some community members had strong negative feelings about the band-operated school. One participant said some people thought it was a “White system.” The other participant said that people in his community were divided into the people who were traditional and the people who were “whitewashed”—assimilated to the dominant culture. The school was the gateway to assimilation. Both these educators felt that school was important to get ahead in life, but they also felt schools should be representative of culture because this would encourage more community members and families to get involved. One educator gave the example of how teachers generally talk too much instead of showing by example. This educator believed in getting to know the children and their gifts, then teaching to develop those gifts in collaboration with grandparents, which is the way things are taught traditionally.

Another Indigenous educator expressed her frustration with parents and caregivers who felt that the public school offered a better education than the band-operated school. She explained that it was not true; children were getting more culture and more one-on-one time with a teacher or a teacher assistant when needed. She wished those parents and caregivers would actually come to the school and see what was going on instead of spreading rumours. Later in the interview, she stated that regardless of whether parents sent their children to the public school or the band-operated school, many parents had “a lot of anger in them. Like they carry this residential school over and over and over ... They don’t know how to come out with emotions that deal with anything proper.”

On the other hand, an Indigenous educator felt that some young parents were just using residential schools as an excuse to not be responsible parents. She expressed anger at these parents because they were not providing the necessary basic care for their children, like morning and bedtime routines, reading to them, and getting to school on time. Residential school legacy has had negative intergenerational impacts on parental practices (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Her anger, which others may share, could push away these parents, as an earlier educator explained was the case with judging. This is another tension and barrier regarding communication and involvement which the community and school have to deal with: Those who are suffering because of the legacy of residential schools and those who judge them.

One Settler teacher looked at community involvement from a social point of view. For her, this meant that the school provided services for basic needs such as breakfast and lunch. She had no expectations that the school would be able to engage more parents and

families because “it’s a small community ... with many problems.” An Indigenous educator echoed the same feeling: “We do a lot of parent involvement, but to get the parents here is another thing.” The school often organized and invited parents but few showed up.

Another non-Indigenous teacher said she felt many parents “shut down” when she called home regarding a learning matter. She said some parents felt that she did not understand because she was not from the community. Only one parent in her class had come for the Meet and Greet event at the beginning of the school year. She had been teaching at the school for many years and believed that parents need support to establish bedtime routines, and provide meals. They need to feel that the school is not judging them. She felt that parents think if they reach out for help their children will be put in foster care; the school is often the official body that reports to social services. This educator felt that trust was just not there.

Supporting parents and families was the role of an Indigenous educator in one community. She helped some families in vulnerable contexts to establish bedtime and morning routines, and to ensure that their children were at school. She also coached parents when they needed to go to school to discuss an issue, so they didn’t “go in there screaming or yelling.” She said it takes a long time to gain trust from a family she worked with but eventually, they trusted that she would support them and not report them to social services. Her hope was that eventually parents would not be afraid to ask for help when they needed it. One Settler teacher thought the school was relying too much on outside expertise. She stated: “People try to give you ideas about parental involvement or

like, produce slideshows for parents or things like that, and it just doesn't ... Those things don't work here. We have to take it from a different perspective, right? Like, parent handouts on how to read to your children, and things like that. It's not ... It's just not going to fly." She thought schools needed to listen more to parents and the community in order to build from their expectations and needs as opposed to telling them what to do.

In total, six participants in this study, (one parent, two non-Indigenous educators, two Indigenous educators, and one elder) talked about how the school was perceived in the community as the entity that filled out reports to social services, which led to having children taken away from parents to live in foster care. This led to the conclusion that it is not only the past that is responsible for the negative image of the school, but also the present situation. For many, the school was responsible for taking their children away from them. All educators who participated in this study were aware that many families saw their school as a negative place, while other families were very supportive of the school. Eleven educators talked about the lack of trust in the school. One of those educators explained that even children did not trust teachers (Indigenous or not) because of what they heard at home about school. An education leader from each community mentioned that unverified negative information about the school was often posted on Facebook, reinforcing some parents' or community members' negative image of the school.

The elders had strong positions regarding parental involvement and communication. An elder talked about how the school system itself is not conducive to parental and family involvement. There is no room in this system, even a band-operated school, for teachings

from parents, grandparents or elders, other than an occasional visit from an elder. All elders saw teachings from elders, parents, and grandparents as an essential part of a child's education. They felt that there should be an official recognition of the family's and the elders' sacred role. They felt that this recognition would foster more family involvement. One elder gave the example that traditionally, and still today, grandparents observed and knew the gifts a child carried. The school should be part of nurturing those gifts or talents that a child is born with and should collaborate with grandparents to develop those gifts. An Indigenous educator said the same thing.

Overall, it seems that the school-family relationships were not as trusting and as strong as needed to create a strong sense of belonging and pride within the school and the community. It also seems that social class was not the only barrier to the relationship. School was seen as a tool of assimilation because there were not enough cultural teachings and practices. Historical intergenerational trauma because of residential schools and day schools, and racist incidents in public schools all contributed to barriers when it came to building a trusting and collaborative relationship with the school. My findings show that the legacy of residential schools and lack of Indigenous culture embedded in the teachings is a barrier for today's Indigenous families and communities when it comes to participating actively in their children's schooling. At the same time, participants mentioned that the cultural component was more present at school than it had been a few years ago. In fact, participants seemed eager to discuss how to build stronger family and school relationships. It was clear that many participants had put considerable thought into this topic.

4.2.2 Solutions and strategies.

Many participants had solutions and strategies to offer regarding family and community involvement.

All the elders understood that some parents were currently involved in their child's education, while others were not involved to the point of not getting up to help their child with breakfast and morning routines before school. In these cases, they thought the community and the school should make sure the children knew they were cared for, that others could step in to ensure proper supporting structures for both the parent (e.g., by supporting development of parenting skills) and for the child (e.g., after school tutoring or a grandparent mentor at school).

The three elders talked about informal school-community gatherings, like feasts, barbecues, and games, where families and teachers met and got to know each other. At these events, parents and caregivers would eventually start asking teachers questions about their child. One elder stated, "For me, seeing the success of those gatherings, I think it's the best way of establish communication with the parents, rather than expecting parents to go to a very formal setting ... They know, they recognize it's important for them to meet with the teacher and discuss progress, but they still have this reluctance because of those memories (talking about parents' or grandparents' negative and abusive experiences with school)."

One elder felt very strongly—the only time she ever slightly raised her voice in the interview—that teachers not living in the community need to participate in community

events if they are to understand the families and children they are teaching and if communication between homes and school is to be built on trust and mutual understanding. She felt it would be respectful of teachers to meet the parents before they met the child, creating the necessary bond of trust for communication and parental involvement.

The educators also had solutions to offer. One Indigenous educator thought parents and families would be more involved in education if there were a room in the school for them. After dropping off their children, or anytime during the day, they could just come. There would be coffee and food in this room and teachers could drop in just to chat briefly about non-school topics. An elder could be present to provide guidance to those who are struggling. He thought a room that is welcoming and inclusive of elders, parents, caregivers, and grandparents would foster a welcoming and open school and go a long way toward healing the image that some parents and community members have of the school and education system because of the legacies of residential schools and racism.

Three non-Indigenous educators and one Indigenous educator talked about the success they had had with family events, like feasts or cultural events where everybody was invited, including aunts and grandparents. They said these events showed the community that the school cared about building a relationship with them, and not just about teaching academics. Academics were not mentioned at these events. Sometimes it was a grandparent, rather than a parent, who attended, but the events nevertheless built relationships with the community.

A non-Indigenous educator said he was successful with parents and families because he got involved in community activities and had developed friendships with community members. He perceived that strong community models and more Indigenous teachers are needed for children to thrive and be successful in school.

In total, ten educators—four non-Indigenous and six Indigenous—shared ideas of how to build stronger relationships with the communities. One non-Indigenous educator talked about the importance of the staff being at the door in the morning to greet the parents and grandparents who brought their children to school. Another non-Indigenous educator thought the school should gather the community’s ideas about how to make the school a more welcoming place for them.

The others had the following ideas:

- “Walking the community”
- being active in community events not related to school
- having a parent and family drop-in room at the school
- home visits
- meeting the parents before September
- having parent-child workshops after school
- inviting parents to share some of their knowledge to the class
- having a culture teacher who is a liaison with the community
- having a support or outreach system for parents (that does not feel like a threat of taking children into foster care). This system would offer learning opportunities based on parents’ expressed needs:

- everyday routines
- planning groceries and meals
- parental practices, including reading to their child, and becoming involved and advocating for their child with institutions like school.

This last idea of an outreach system existed in one school and was proving to be effective in the sense that more students are attending school. It was a new system and so it was too early to see results regarding achievement, but attendance had improved 100% for students participating in the outreach. When I asked how many of these students would be at school without her services, the outreach educator was adamant: none would be at school. She worked with 20 to 25 families at a time, depending on the need. While she worked mostly with low SES families, this educator stated that she also worked with middle-class families who needed parenting skill support. She believed the residential school legacy had made it difficult for many adults, including middle-class parents, to develop even basic parental skills.

The elders and educators were aware that a strong relationship between school, parents, families, and community is essential to the students' success. All said that more parents and community members were involved than a few years back, but more parental, family, and community involvement was still necessary to keep moving forward. Strategies such as organizing more cultural events, integrating Indigenous teachings and practices, and meeting parents and caregivers before the start of the school year could be gateways to building trust. But it needs to be everybody's responsibility to build those trusting relationships, as Moss (2009) has said.

4.2.3 Use of language.

Because both schools used English as the language of instruction and of communication with parents and caregivers, *use of language* in this section concerns the use of English. My findings align with my literature review: I found that a communication gap exists even for some middle-class Indigenous families, although it is more prevalent in families in vulnerable situations.

One elder talked about the language barrier to parental and family involvement. Although the parents and caregivers are proficient in English, they do not use the same words to express themselves. Therefore, there were often misunderstandings between some parents and teachers, including middle-class parents. The elder said, “And they have different ways of expressing their own, their own thoughts on their child's progress. ... It makes it much more difficult for communication to take place because there's misunderstanding on both parts (teachers and parents).” He thought teachers should be taught at university how families express themselves culturally. He stated that it is now being taught at some universities.

An Indigenous educator said parents—some middle-class, but more often parents from a vulnerable context—called her instead of calling a non-Indigenous teacher when they were angry. She added that non-Indigenous teachers often “sugar coated” what they wanted to tell parents, which just confused and angered some parents because they were not sure how to interpret the message from teachers. This statement speaks to Delpit's studies (e.g., 2012) that showed teachers often use a linguistic code that parents do not understand when they are not from the dominant group.

Other educators explained variations of the theme of not understanding teachers. One educator, now a grandmother, said that she herself, as a younger parent, did not want to come to school because teachers “have the big words” and she didn’t understand what they said. She said she was more comfortable now because she worked at the school. She is an example of another important reason to support a parent and community room for lingering, learning, and influencing the culture and language of schooling. Another Indigenous educator had the same message: “Parents feel a real sense of intimidation when entering a school system that your teachers are better educated, that they’re going to somehow talk around you, and they’re just not going to understand. You don’t have the right words to get them to see what you’re trying to say about your child.” This educator added, “Teachers and parents often do not speak the same language” (even if they both speak English). While a teacher might be talking about the importance of attendance, a parent might be trying to explain the barriers she or he is facing but ends up feeling judged and not heard, which leads to the parent becoming silent and then calling an Indigenous educator after leaving the school. Or these parents fear they will not know what questions to ask. They have a sense of teachers patting them on the head and sending them on their way. Because she was a teacher, this educator said she often tried to “bridge that cultural misconception gap,” using “teacher speak” to help non-Indigenous educators understand what the parents are saying. She said these parents were mostly from a vulnerable context, although some middle-class parents also called on her support. Two other Indigenous educators said that parents or caregivers often called them after leaving a meeting with a non-Indigenous educator because they felt like they had not been heard.

A total of six Indigenous participants (five educators and one elder) spoke of differences in the way Indigenous parents and teachers express themselves, which created a tension in the dialogue that frustrated parents. Non-Indigenous educators seemed to not be aware of this, as none mentioned this cultural gap. Too many parents and caregivers are not comfortable in the school setting. In a First Nations context, the discomfort does not seem always to be aligned with the families' class, but rather to be more of a cultural way of expressing oneself. Nevertheless, this creates yet another barrier to parental, family, and community participation and trusting communication.

In my classroom observations, I rarely witnessed children challenging their teachers. I did notice two children who would often say no to the teacher but they had a medical condition. While some children sometimes failed to do the work required, or complained about this or that (e.g., "That's a lot to write!") or asked questions to avoid doing the work (e.g., "Can I eat now?" "Can I go get another book?"), I did not observe children openly challenging teachers using words, as cultural capital theory says middle-class children do.

In the classrooms, teachers seemed to be using direct language. I only noted two incidents, in all of my 21 observations, where the use of language caused confusion for children. One was when a teacher asked the students, "How could we light up the world during Christmas time?" The students were very keen to offer ideas of how to light up streets with more lights. The teacher quickly rephrased her question so children would understand that she was not talking about physical light. The language code incident I witnessed was when a teacher was reading a short chapter to the class during guided

reading. Afterwards, she told one child: “Why don’t you take the book during independent reading and read the first chapter, as you were absent yesterday.” The child’s eyes went very wide and after a few seconds, she asked the teacher: “Take it where?”

My analysis shows that teachers, including non-Indigenous teachers, used direct language with their students: “You need to follow now,” as opposed to, “What are you supposed to do now?”, which would be negotiating language; “Put this away please,” instead of, “Is this where it goes?” This seems to indicate that Indigenous teachers knew the cultural way language is used and the non-Indigenous teachers—who had been teaching for many years at the band-operated school—had adapted their use of language to meet children’s needs. But non-Indigenous teachers did not seem to be aware that there is a language barrier, as I found that parents would just stay silent and call an Indigenous leader or teacher after a meeting. These teachers did not have an opportunity to learn to adjust their language to what works best when communicating with parents and families, as they did with children.

4.2.4 Cultural capital and family involvement.

To paraphrase one participant’s expression, in addition to the mistrust generated by generations of oppression, the “cultural misconception gap” was a barrier to parental involvement at the school. Another barrier was to family and community involvement was a sense that the school was representative not of Indigenous culture, but of White culture.

It is essential to break through these unique barriers created by the patterns of social structures that keep reproducing inequality. We need to undo social structures (such as schools) and ways of doing that are framed by a Western framework, and develop new social structures—in this instance schools—that are framed by a commonly-understood purpose of education. Discussions with participants generated solutions about how to develop a new school structure that would be more open to the community and thus break down barriers to building trusting and collaborative relationships with the school.

My findings are not fully aligned with cultural capital theory, as some Indigenous middle-class parents in my research did not adhere to concerted cultivation practices such as being actively involved in their child's schooling, providing structured activities for them, or teaching them to use language as negotiating tool. I found that Indigenous middle-class parents themselves did not use language as a negotiating tool and were often frustrated when dealing with a non-Indigenous teacher. While cultural capital theory is explicit that families from vulnerable contexts feel powerless and frustrated with schools, my findings show that some Indigenous middle-class families also feel that way. Elders also sometimes feel angry and frustrated with the school system. Educators are aware that many families do not trust school. Many parents or caregivers, including middle-class parents, do not really discuss with principals or teachers but instead call community members after a meeting to have a secondary discussion regarding a meeting or conversation with a school staff member. These behaviours are not based on class alone, but also on ethnicity. Educators perceive many parents and caregivers, as well as the community, to be uninvolved in education, or to be involved mostly in their child's

behavioural issues or bullying situations. Teachers do not see this type of involvement as beneficial for achievement. It is then all too easy for them to convey low expectations to students, as they perceive keeping children safe is the main parent expectation.

Initiatives have been put in place to support families in vulnerable contexts, such as a liaison teacher to align home and school cultural capital. Some of these have been successful or partially so. In the literature review, I stated that cultural capital is mobile and that some Indigenous families, mostly middle-class, can and do learn to align their parental practices with the school's expectations regarding parental involvement. But my findings show that the issues are so complex that it will take more than teaching families to align to the school's expectations of parental practices if the achievement gap is to be closed. The very purpose of education has to be aligned with families' and communities' expectations and needs in order to create learning environments that foster First Nations student success.

4.3 Academics

One of the categories that emerged from this study is academics. This is not a surprise as this study was done in a school context and I asked participants about their expectations regarding students or their children. However, academic success was not the priority for many Indigenous parents or caregivers, and it was not the only priority for elders and some educators. In the next section I examine findings regarding academics, first as general expectations and then specific to literacy.

4.3.1 General expectations.

Eight of the ten non-Indigenous educators I interviewed answered my general question regarding expectations and school by describing academic success as the main expectation regarding school, whether they were talking about their own expectations or expressing their perception of what they thought parents wanted. One non-Indigenous educator answered that parents wanted foremost that their children be safe. He strove to create a safe learning environment. Another teacher thought for a few moments before answering the question about parents' expectations and then answered, "I don't know what parents expect. We don't ask them. Why don't we ask them? We should ask them."

For the participants who mentioned academic expectations, there was a difference between their own expectations and how they perceived others' expectations. Of the nine parents and caregivers who participated, seven mentioned academic expectations, though not as a priority. Only two of those participants had high academic expectations, although all parents wanted their children to "get through school." This indicates that parents and caregivers do want their children to succeed, even if they have other predominant concerns, such as safety.

For the parents with high academic expectations, one was a young parent from a vulnerable context and the other was a middle-class grandmother. The grandmother/caregiver, talking about her grandchildren, said she wanted them "to accomplish more than they can here (band-operated school), as much as possible, especially with our culture ... Homework first, then you can go out and play if it's still light out." She felt that the school upheld high academic and behaviour expectations. The

parent from a vulnerable context stated, “Well, my expectations are for her learning skills to improve, for her to succeed and to have a great education.” This young parent perceived that the band-operated school had lower expectations than the public school: “I find that they get more homework over there (public school in nearby town), and they get more books to read. And here it’s very little homework and only one book to read, and I find he’s (talking about a nephew attending public school) learning skills and more highly developed than here.” This parent had chosen the band-operated school for his daughter because of the cultural component, but he was not convinced this was the right choice. He felt torn between his perception of a stronger education in public school and a more holistic education at the band-operated school. While academic success was important for both of these participants, culture was just as important.

The other five parents or caregivers, all middle-class, who mentioned academics had low expectations for their children. Here are some of their comments:

“My expectation ... Stay in school.”

“But I just want them to get through high school, and I would love to be able to see them with honour rolls and that, but my expectation is to pass. Unfortunately, I should raise the bar a little higher than that, but ...”

“I want to make sure he has a good day because sometimes he doesn’t ... so I’m hoping that he is not in that category too [talking about children with learning disabilities].”

“Well educated like ... Kind of not too far behind ...” This parent felt that the school had low expectations in general. She added that she felt her child was not getting a quality

education because “everybody’s modifying to kind of fit.” She explained that many babies born the same year as her child in her community were methadone babies. She felt strongly that children should attend the band-operated school because of the cultural component.

In summary, parents and caregivers prioritized safety and culture over academic expectations for their children. They felt that the school in some cases had low academic expectations for their children. Parents had different expectations, with safety being more important than academics, while educators generally talked about academic expectations more than about safety and culture expectations.

The three elders upheld high expectations of the school but their answers went beyond academic learning, even when talking about subjects such as numeracy and literacy. One elder insisted that teachers need to teach “the whole child, not just what’s out of the book.” Another elder felt that academic learning should be done through nature and traditional stories. She felt children would be motivated to write and read if their learning was based on a relationship with nature and on storytelling. A third elder felt that parents wanted their children to have strong academic skills but also to be strong in their culture. He felt band-operated schools had a unique opportunity to meet those goals and stated that he was very proud of all the work band-operated schools had done in recent years.

Of the 20 educators who participated in this study, 18 talked about expectations regarding academic learning. Eleven participants stated that they had high expectations, while seven participants talked about low academic expectations. When participants talked

about their high expectations, I would ask them, “What does that look like?” The following responses show that their concern with well-being overshadowed academic expectations. Again, this seems to signal that high expectations are words that have not been translated into actions or that people understand “expectation” very differently:

“Some kids just need attention and love before learning can even take place.”

“How do I convey high expectations? ... I don’t know, just by helping them feel the importance of learning to read or learning to write.”

“We need to provide the socio-emotional needs in those students before educational.”

“As long as they’re trying their best, that’s all I ask them to do. And not give up on themselves.”

These statements, and others, are aligned with the literature review on expectations:

Teachers tend to have lower academic expectations when children are from a different ethnicity or from a vulnerable environment. There are no specific goals written in the school plan, and to say, “doing their best” instead of stating specific goals has been identified in the literature as an indicator of low expectations (Walkey, McClure, Meyer, & Weir, 2013).

Two educators had good knowledge of how to convey high expectations by targeting specific strategies or actions:

“We’ve incorporated guided reading, which is data-driven, and which is a very, very good way of increasing our reading.”

“Clearly telling them, or explaining to them, what I expect.”

This last teacher thought that most teachers held low expectations for their students. They too often used children’s home situation as a reason why they would not learn. She

thought they could learn if everybody held high expectations. Her thinking is aligned with research that demonstrates how teachers' perceptions or blame of the home, parenting skills, or low motivation in the child translate into low expectations. These low expectations actually limit students' educational opportunities.

I conducted 21 observations in three different classrooms, including when literacy or other support educators were in the classroom, mostly in language arts classes. I looked at how teachers convey expectations in a way that aligns with Ambady and Rosenthal's (1992) work. They talked about two types of expectations: affective tone and quality of interactions with students. They found that students respond to these signals by behaving as expected in the classroom. *Affective tone* includes elements such as being friendly (e.g., smiling, playful dialogue), praising accurately for success, and non-verbal communication (e.g., nodding, leaning forward to listen to student). *Quality of interaction* includes elements such as giving time to answer questions, giving prompts to improve answers, offering detailed feedback, and using effective teaching methods.

I observed many examples of positive affective tone conveying high expectations. Teachers and teacher assistants were very friendly with students, even more than in a public school setting where I had taught for many years. Here, teachers bought snacks for the students out of their own money, teachers and teacher assistants combed children's hair, and they seemed to know about the children's lives. They listened patiently to the students' stories. However, I also saw examples of children being praised even if they had not completed the work: "That's awesome!". When I looked at the worksheet, it had not been completed and what was done was not correct. Another child said, "Teacher, I

just read 85 pages” when the child was not reading and it would have been impossible given the time. The teacher just replied, “That’s great!”

In all three classes, both classroom teachers and specialist teachers gave a lot of general praise that was not specific to learning, strategies, or skill. For example, they made more comments like, “Great! You are doing well!” than specific and helpful comments like, “You do know how to understand complex sentences” or, “You are good at writing a sentence with the new words we learned today.” When teacher was specific, I observed the children concentrating and becoming even more engaged in what they were doing. Comments like, “I see you are still mixing up these letters. Let’s practice before continuing this activity” helped the teacher observe what needed to be taught next, instead of a delivering a general writing or reading lesson.

I observed some elements of quality of interaction. For example, in all classes I often witnessed the strategy of giving prompts to improve answers. Teachers regularly asked students to repeat instructions. But overall, the quality of interaction did not always indicate of high expectations. Teachers rarely provided detailed feedback. Only in one class did the teacher explain to the students the goals of the lesson or activity, specifying what they were expected to do. In one class, the teacher sometimes asked the teacher assistant to finish the activity for some students, or even finished it herself. This teacher did not have a strategy to ensure that all students did the work or even listened to her instructions, as there were many interruptions by students in that class. There were also a lot of other interruptions in the classroom, making it hard for the teacher to just teach. In most classes I observed, there was always either a parent coming in to talk to their child

or bring a snack, a specialist teacher coming in to talk to teacher about scheduling or about students, somebody requiring the teacher to stop teaching and print a list, or a teacher coming in for one reason or another, such as special event preparation. Constant interruptions impact the teacher's ability to teach and the students' ability to become engaged, which can influence academic expectations.

The schools had improvement plans. One school had written policies but only one educator referred to those documents in the interviews. The plans do not mention expectations. In summary, I observed a gap between what participants said were their expectations and what actually happened in the classroom. While teachers were very emotionally caring towards their students, they often talked about the students' home situation as a barrier to success. It is the same story for literacy.

4.3.2 Literacy.

As I showed in the literature review chapter, the habit of literacy is one aspect of cultural capital that has a positive impact on school success regardless of ethnicity or socioeconomic context. I therefore chose to ask a specific question about literacy habits in my interviews. I conducted my classroom observations mostly in language arts classes and I examined school policies, school plans, and documents in relation to literacy. I found that most educators realized they were not successful at involving parents and caregivers when it came to literacy. Some shared possible solutions but did not put them into action for lack of time, lack of collective support, or a feeling it was not their responsibility.

All educators stated that their school was doing a lot regarding literacy, compared to a few years back. Here are the schools' literacy strategies:

- Holding literacy nights, with more parents participating every year
- Sending books home
- Collaborating with the Head Start organization to reach out to parents regarding the importance of reading to children
- Staffing each school with literacy teachers
- Providing teachers with professional learning on efficient literacy teaching practices
- Teaching structured literacy in the classroom
- Establishing professional learning communities to discuss literacy
- Using assessments (both formative and summative) to inform instruction
- Bringing in volunteers to read with children

In both schools, the literacy teacher was co-teaching in the classroom rather than always taking children to a separate room. In one school, the Grade 2 provincial reading scores in 2014-2015 were higher than the provincial average. However, only 53% of the students had done the assessment. The scores were not available for 2015-2016. In the other school, the results were higher than the provincial average in reading in 2015-2016, but were below the provincial average in 2016-2017. Approximately half the students in all three classes had special education plans and most of these children were exempt from assessments. I asked educators why so many children had a special education plan (SEP) and found that there is a general expectation that children in band-operated school classes

will need special education plans more often than do children in public school because of their family environments. I observed in one class that students with a SEP responded better to the literacy teacher, who always started her learning activity with a clear goal and modeling while telling the children that they could achieve this because of their knowledge, which was a required foundation to build new knowledge. She conveyed high expectations and the children responded by performing better with her than with the classroom teacher. She also did activities with a smaller group rather than with the whole class. However, I observed these same children over and over not achieving as well with the classroom teacher, even in a small group. This is aligned with studies in the literature review: Children learn better and more in a high expectation environment.

When discussing provincial assessments, educators claimed that while they were very happy with their students' success on the Grade 2 assessments, they were falling behind in Grades 3 or 4. Three of the educators I interviewed explained that difficulties in vocabulary and in understanding inferences were the reason for the lower scores. A fourth educator stated that this was because the teachers were good at teaching decoding but more needed to be done regarding teaching comprehension, vocabulary, and writing. More research is needed to determine the cause of this phenomenon. Principals and teachers stated that literacy was a teaching priority. In other words, a lot is going on in literacy and results are increasing at the Grade 2 level, though results are not there yet at other grade levels. All educators in this study believed that reading at home is important but they did not think that most parents and caregivers read to children at home. They felt that the parent-school relationship was just not strong enough, not trusting enough in

some cases, to engage parents. Two educators indicated that Head Start and Junior Kindergarten were having an impact: More young parents were reading to their children. One Settler teacher thought that teachers needed to build a relationship with parents in order to impart literacy habits at home. She thought that spaghetti suppers might be the place to attract parents and talk about literacy habits at home. She thought that some research-based strategies that may be effective in a non-Indigenous context might not work in an Indigenous context. She talked about how people who do not know the context nevertheless try to propose effective strategies (Trudgett et al., 2017).

An Indigenous teacher stated that while the school was doing a lot more in regards to literacy, it was still struggling with convincing some parents and caregivers to read to their children. She said it was because of all the mistrust between school and families, generated by residential schools, day schools, and bullying at school that was still very frequent even 20 years ago. Like other participants, she did not see family and community involvement as being present. This is a legacy of colonialism.

Another Indigenous educator stated that bedtime routines were a problem in some families. Children were just expected to fall asleep when they fall asleep. There was no routine with a bedtime story, and so telling these families that they need to read to their children before putting them to bed just doesn't align with their ways of doing things. This educator said that parents needed coaching in order to develop a bedtime routine for their children. Two other educators said the same thing: Many parents have had no model of how to parent because of the legacy of residential schools. They need coaching on basic parental tasks such as bedtime routines, reading a book, getting children ready for

school in the morning (getting up, preparing a healthy breakfast, and putting on clean clothes). One educator felt that there should be a program between the school and homes of families in vulnerable situations to model basic routines, from making breakfast in the morning to reading books at night. An educator from another school stated that parents were very receptive to her coaching, as her role was a liaison between the school and the families. She stressed the importance of not judging these parents, explaining that when parents feel judged by the school, they just became less engaged in education and more frustrated with the school.

One Indigenous teacher thought that most parents and caregivers were reading to their children at some point but not every night. Her expectations were low, as she shared her belief that if parents did not get involved, she could not teach literacy skills successfully in the classroom. I observed the low expectations in that classroom. During independent reading, very few children actually read. The teacher seldom interfered. I saw children staring at a book upside down, flipping through a book, or playing with material in the class, but not reading. As long as they were quiet, this teacher did not interfere with their non-reading. She also spoke about how torn she was between teaching them a “standard” English and letting them speak the way they speak at home. She wondered about the continuing role that school plays in the disappearance of native languages. I felt her voice become hard and angry as she spoke of her native language and the Western schooling model on the reserve. I also felt that her strong cultural beliefs created an internal tension regarding teaching literacy. I remember wondering if she might have had higher

expectations of her students had she felt less torn between two cultures and more encouraged to integrate culture and home language within her literacy teaching.

Another Indigenous educator felt that healing needed to take place because of residential schools and other forms of oppression Indigenous peoples had suffered. She felt that part of that healing would be to infuse Indigenous knowledges and resources into literacy learning and other academic learning to promote a sense of pride in their identity. She felt the language arts curricula should be more inclusive of oral storytelling and legends, to reflect and value Indigenous cultures. She felt these approaches would engage more parents and caregivers and would make school more respectful of Indigenous cultures. She said she had struggled with these gaps when she taught in a classroom, as she had wanted both to give her students a holistic education embedded in culture and to follow curriculum guidelines. She was no longer a classroom teacher but still felt strongly that a more holistic education should include culture. Like the previous teacher, this teacher felt the tension between her Western postsecondary education, the band-operated school's Western school system structure, and her own cultural beliefs about education.

At the time of my study, culture was not only separate from the curriculum, but the system itself acted as a barrier. For example, two teachers told me that the books featuring the culture are not used to teach literacy skills because they are not leveled. Two classes had posters on wall referring to words in the Indigenous language and another class had a cultural corner with smudging items. But for the most part, the teaching and learning activities I observed could have happened in any public school, because teachers are using provincial curricula. In two classes I observed two lessons that

were embedded in culturally-relevant material. One guided reading activity was based on a book that spoke of Inuit culture. This book was part of a collection that included a guided reading teacher manual. However, while this book spoke of an Indigenous culture, it did not speak of the children's Indigenous culture. Another teacher started her lesson with a presentation by a knowledge keeper, who explained how wigwams were traditionally built and then asked the children to write about building wigwams during the following days. Teachers are left to their own understandings of how to integrate culture and academics, as integrating cultural knowledges was not part of the policies or of their teacher education. These two initiatives came from the teachers, not from the expectations of the school or the curriculum. Teachers were not adapting their teaching to the children's culture. In their own teacher education at university they had not learned about teaching in an Indigenous context, nor had they ever been asked to teach in this way.

In regard to literacy, education leaders and principals talked about closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. They spent time and energy organizing professional learning for teachers, buying resources, providing extra resources for teachers, and building partnerships with school districts in order to have access to literacy specialists. All of them spoke of better literacy results in their schools as a result of a more organized structures regarding teaching literacy and support staff. They also spoke of the importance of culture and identity building.

One Indigenous leader said: "Before contact, European contact, the First Nations family was involved in family literacy every second, every moment of their lives. They were

able to read the weather; they were able to read the atmosphere, able to read the daylight, the night, the rivers, the trees, the grass and the animals. And that was family literacy, so ... It's innate in First Nations people that they understand that, and I think as a community, we could put in our schools, that aspect of outdoor education for more parents and grandparents to be involved rather than being cooped up in the classroom all day, we could have parents and grandparents volunteer and become part of outdoor education by being, by being with the kids when they're taking on this outdoor education path and have their experiences related to the kids that are taking part in outdoor education. These parents could help out in a lot of those areas." This speaks to the differences between the provincial curriculum goals and traditional Indigenous education that can and should be adapted to today's education.

Only two educators (non-Indigenous) thought the school should do things like send tip sheets to parents about how to read to a child. The other educators in this study understood that many First Nations parents and families looked at literacy and their involvement differently. However, the educators did not necessarily know how to adapt their literacy pedagogy to respond culturally to the needs of First Nations families, even if the teachers were themselves Indigenous. In fact, some educators did not feel it was up to them, as they were delivering curriculum. Some educators understood that schools should do things differently to encourage parental and family involvement. They did not necessarily have time or had not been assigned the task of doing things differently from how they had learned at university and—significantly—were continuing to learn through

professional development. Educators' own learning—including that of Indigenous educators—is embedded in Western ways of doing.

Both school plans had a literacy component. One school called its plan an *improvement plan*. Its target was for 80% of children to be at grade level in both reading and writing. It described research-based strategies to meet that goal in 2016-2018. The plan mentioned oral retelling of a story but not developing oral communication skills. The other school called its plan a *success plan*. It called for students' literacy proficiency to increase by 10% every year. This plan mentioned oral language but there were no specific goals other than to develop a plan and recommend professional development for teachers. More was being done to promote good literacy practices and teaching strategies with teachers, with the result that children in Grade 2 had been performing better in the last few years on provincial assessments, except for one class in 2016-2017. I was surprised at how little of the plan targeted oral communication, especially as teachers were adamant that vocabulary skills were low and children did not understand inferences. Oral communication is embedded in Indigenous culture. The priorities evident in the school plans might indicate that these schools are following the provincial system's ways of prioritizing reading and writing rather than infusing culture in literacy.

From the elders' point of view literacy was important. They said literacy teaching needs to be embedded in traditional teachings and practices, stories, and the languages of the peoples. It needs to be taught by bringing children outside to teach them about nature and then getting them inside to write and read about what they had learned outside. Literacy

needs to include the native language and to be in the native language. Their position was very clear: Literacy goes hand in hand with culture and language.

4.3.3 Cultural capital and academics.

While middle-class parents of the dominant culture have very high expectations for their child's achievement, many Indigenous parents and caregivers want their child to graduate but do not have particularly high expectations regarding achievement. This is not aligned with cultural capital theory, where middle-class parents have high expectations regardless of ethnicity. Many barriers exist that are embedded in colonialism and in culture, not just in parental practices of different social classes.

From my observations and my conversations with educators, I have concluded that the low expectations environment is created because educators (whether collectively or individually) either do not know how to foster a high expectation space that includes specific indicators, or because educators put caring for children's wellbeing in the forefront to the point that it interferes with the children's academic education. Their words say one thing, while what actually happens is something else. Educators care very much about their students. As I looked at how teacher's perceptions influence expectations regarding student success, it became clear that collectively, the school and most teachers did not have high expectations, mostly because of their perceptions of the children's family and community environment. In other words, the cultural capital that parents transfer to their children is understood by teachers to be not enough to generate high expectations for achievement. Educators tend to go directly to academic success when asked about what they think parents expect from the school, while the first thoughts

of parents and elders regarding school expectations are related to safety and culture. This means that parents, elders, and educators are not aligned when it comes to educational expectations. The literature shows that high expectations, along with parental involvement with aligned expectations, are important for school success (Stelmach & Preston, 2008).

4.4 Learning Environment

The learning environment was a theme that came up often in this research, mostly in the sense of whether it was perceived to be safe or unsafe. Lareau (2003) talked about how parents and children from concerted cultivation feel comfortable in the school environment because it is aligned with their home culture. Many children of concerted cultivation feel safe to express themselves at school the way they do at home. Other researchers have said that it is essential to look at why some families have advantages when it comes to school success. Battiste (2017) called for going beyond simply adding Indigenous content to also look at the assumptions within education. As it is, “whiteness is hidden in this (education) system, because it never looks at itself only the perceived ‘different other’” (p. 106). She stated that questioning the relationships of power that are embedded in colonialism needs to be the starting point of the conversation to better understand the expectations and the narrative woven within the system.

My findings regarding expectations and learning environment led to two key words: *safety* and *relationships*. Participants in my study used a stronger word than Lareau’s (2003). Where she talked about children feeling comfortable, they talked about wanting the children to be safe. Throughout my interviews and my observations, I often felt a

tension between wanting to provide a good quality education, wanting one's child to have a good quality education, and resentment—sometimes even hostility—towards school, even among Indigenous teachers or elders, who perceived school to be an unsafe cultural environment. Battiste provided an explanation of that tension when she talked about questioning the power relationships that shape the education system, as opposed to simply sprinkling cultural elements into the system and not questioning its “whiteness.” I have found through this study that a culturally safe environment is embedded in relationships that are culturally safe for families. Participants spoke about how the school still felt like an unsafe physical environment because of the oppression legacy, wherein schools were an assimilation structure with many forms of abuse. In the next sub-sections I explain my findings about the learning environment.

4.4.1 Safety.

Twelve of the 20 educators (five Indigenous and seven non-Indigenous) I interviewed said safety was their biggest concern. One of these educators talked about cultural safety, saying that when there is culture in the school, the children feel safer, like they belong there. Two other educators talked about how children feel safe within the school walls, as opposed to feeling unsafe in some homes. The other nine educators perceived that the most important expectations of parents and caregivers were in relation to physical safety. One educator said that when she called home for an academic issue, she felt parents did not want to discuss it. But when she called regarding a behavioural issue, they were more willing to discuss, whether their child had a behaviour issue or was being bullied.

The following statements are other examples of educators' perception that safety is a bigger issue for parents than academic success. The participants' quotations are presented verbatim.

“Because I think that’s their biggest concern. The safety of the kids, it’s not the math.”

“They’re (parents) are more worried about bullying.”

“I have a kindergarten student I drove home right before Christmas, and her grandfather said: ‘I was bullied all through school, and I told my kids, my grandkids, every one of them, every day, if somebody pushed you, whatever, you make sure you defend yourself and you push them back’.”

The parents and caregivers also talked about safety as an important expectation. One parent shared the story of her friend who had pulled her child out of the school because she was not happy with the way the school had handled a particular bullying incident. She herself was happy with the school for creating a safe environment. One middle-class

grandmother explained that the school expectations were, “To follow the rules and be on their best behaviour, and if they do have problems, to actually come tell somebody, you know, not keep it bottled up and explode.” This grandmother talked about behaviour and safety expectations, but did not mention academic expectations. One middle-class parent talked about how she was satisfied with the teachers and how they handled bullying incidents involving her daughter. Another middle-class parent mentioned how some parents thought teachers were just “picking” on their child’s behaviour when, in her opinion, they were trying to tell parents that the child’s behaviour made it unsafe for other children and was detrimental to his or her own learning.

One middle-class mother had a very different view of safety at school. She said that when the school called her because her child was being bullied at school and was afraid of another child, she told them that her child was going to have to learn to live with that child because they would have many years together. She was very accepting of life and of what she felt were lessons her child had to learn to become stronger. This attitude is the opposite of what Lareau said a middle-class mother would do when intervening with an institute. Lareau (2003; 2011) said that middle-class parents speak on behalf of their children, nurturing a sense of entitlement in the child.

When I observed the classroom, the children were safe and not being bullied. With a teacher and often a teacher-assistant in the classroom, the children were well-looked after. I did not witness a single incident of verbal or physical violence either in the classroom or in the halls. That does not mean bullying never happened, but it did not seem to be an everyday occurrence. It made me wonder if all the concern with safety was

partly a legacy from the parents' and community's collective memory of oppression, racism, and residential schools. This legacy is still being carried over to the children. Elders say people need to heal. But it is not what I witnessed in the schools. In fact, I witnessed a lot of caring and actions to make sure the children were comfortable. Teachers gave snacks to students who had none, combed students' hair, and asked personal questions to create loving relationships (e.g., health of an aging dog, visit to an auntie). I did observe one seven-year-old boy, who often silently resisted the teacher's instructions to the class (by not doing work), mumble twice to himself, "This is not how my people do it." This boy did not feel the classroom was his cultural environment; rather, it was a hostile environment. It was easy to deduce that he was probably not encouraged at home to collaborate with the teachers, but rather heard discourse that school is not an Indigenous environment.

One elder described how the learning environment should be in school. She used the term "culturally safe environment." With her permission, I kept that expression because it honours what all elders said, what one educator stated clearly, and what that one boy mumbled. The elder defined a safe environment as a culturally sacred environment where sacred teachings are taught to counter bullying and to ensure children are proud of their identity and carry this knowledge with them. She said this creates an environment where children respect themselves and each other. I thought of the boy I described earlier and how he would thrive in such an environment. All three elders agreed that school needs to have more Indigenous culture and language, more outdoor education, more education about relationships, more education about Indigenous knowledge and practices. But to

arrive at that point, teachers and administrators need to make it a culturally safe environment where culture is valued and is part of everyday learning, where elders and community members do some of the teaching, and where Indigenous identity and language are valued.

In cultural capital theory, it is said that children of middle-class families are more comfortable at school. My findings go beyond comfortable or uncomfortable to reveal insights related to feeling safe, both physically and culturally.

4.4.2 Relationships.

Two parents living in vulnerable contexts thought that children were more successful at public schools. However, they kept their children at the band-operated school. One explained that she lived close to the school and this was more convenient. The other parent chose the band-operated school because of the cultural aspect. Both said they had a good relationship with the school, but they were also the parents who did not participate in school activities. The other parents I interviewed did not comment negatively on the quality of the education at the band-operated school. They talked about the importance of community and family relationships and said the school was part of that. One middle-class mother said she liked the band-operated school better because the people understood family and community ties.

Educators from both schools stated that the learning environment is influenced by what is going on in the community. Issues in the community get carried into the school and sometimes influence the relationships between students or with staff. I observed this

influence on two separate occasions in the classroom when the children were very agitated. The teacher explained to me that something had happened the previous night or weekend.

The elders talked about going beyond superficial changes at school, such as making dream catchers or making culture a subject, and instead moving forward to a point where language and culture were at the core of every learning. More specifically, the language, spirituality, belief systems, and knowledge have to be, “acknowledged and recognized as valid sources of information . . . also as valued, valid aspects of the curriculum.” This is true not only for Indigenous students but for all students, in order to have a more cohesive society where authentic relationships are built on understanding each other.

The relationship to self (honouring one’s gifts and finding one’s spiritual essence), the relationship to others, and the relationship to nature and land should all be part of the learning environment. One elder explained that language teaches those relationships and that, unfortunately, most language classes simply taught vocabulary and grammar.

Interestingly, many children have a relationship with their language, even if they do not speak it fluently and might not even be aware of this relationship to their language. I often heard them use the Indigenous word for family members, such as the word for their grandfather or aunt. Because Wabanaki languages are not gendered, I observed some children (and educated adults) say “he” or “his” when referring to a woman and vice-versa. Wabanaki languages are action oriented. I heard children using nouns as verbs. For example, I often heard, “Can I garbage this paper?” to the point where even Settler teachers also used that expression. I also heard, “I snowed him!” and, “Can you zipper

me?” It is easy to understand the meaning of these sentences but it signifies that even though the children speak English, they sometimes use Wabanaki structure or syntax. This is important because some participants mentioned many times that language and culture need to structure the learning environment.

The other aspect of culture I observed in the classrooms was the children’s relationships with their families. While in a public school the children often speak of their structured activities (e.g., dance, swimming, or sports), the children here often spoke about family members: “It was my auntie’s birthday last night”; “My grandpa made supper and it was delicious.” This speaks to the fact that the children, even the middle-class children, spent a lot of time with kin and not so much time in structured activities. Other than one child who played hockey and two girls who were traditional dancers, the children in the three classes never spoke of structured activities. Even the traditional dancers’ activity was with family. All children spoke of family when asked what they had done on the weekend or last night. Relationships are a very important part of Indigenous children’s lives. When they spoke of “family” it did not always refer to immediate blood relations but to members of their community who were also considered family in Indigenous culture. The teachers I observed were mindful of this cultural aspect. They talked to children about their family and were interested in the children’s stories about their family, remembering details to ask more questions the following day. In a culture where family and community relationships are important, these conversations are an important part of creating a culturally appropriate learning environment.

The elders saw the current learning environment as better than it had been in the past, as there were now more cultural activities in the schools. I observed that families seemed happy when they attended a mini Pow wow or a cultural day at a school. However, the elders still saw school as a structure that assimilates to the dominant culture rather than creating the rightful space for language and culture. School was not a culturally safe environment where children could develop and be proud of their Indigenous identity, develop an authentic relationship to self, others, and nature, and also learn the skills and knowledge to achieve academic success.

To create such learning environments in either a band-operated school or a public school, the elders felt that teacher education should include strong knowledge of and relationship with their culture. One elder added that when teachers took the time to learn a few words in the language, the students felt more accepted and would work harder for that teacher. Of the 20 educators I interviewed, 15 mentioned culture and language as being an important part of education in school. While many participants realized culture and language important, and more cultural activities are happening in school and in the community, many participants also stated that their own teacher education did not help them develop a learning environment that promoted a learning relationship to culture.

4.4.3 Cultural capital and learning environment.

Learning environment is another area of misalignment between the concerted cultivation practices expected by school and the expectations of many middle-class educators and parents. While safety is a concern for all parents—nobody wants their child to be hurt at

school—Settlers do not have a collective memory that school is actually a dangerous and abusive place.

In my research, it seems that ethnicity does make a difference. Some middle-class parents, and even leaders such as elders, did not agree with focusing on mechanisms to align families to the standards and expectations of the school. Rather, they called for a learning environment that legitimises their Indigenous culture. While Indigenous education leaders and elders agreed that reading is important and should be encouraged at home (a concerted cultivation practice), they also felt strongly that the learning environment should better reflect their cultural values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills. Being outdoors more often is a strong cultural practice that aligns with natural growth practices (as opposed to concerted cultivation) in the cultural capital model. This is important to note, as Lareau (2003; 2011) argued that while concerted cultivation practices are aligned with the schools' and other institutions' expectations, this comes with a price—children of concerted cultivation are often more tired and anxious. She stressed that natural growth is not about deficient child-rearing practices but rather about different practices that are currently not valued by society; natural growth practices are not perceived to confer advantages in our current society.

4.4.4 Teacher education.

I asked educators about their own teacher education and professional learning to discover their understanding of different families' parental practices, in this instance Indigenous families or families from vulnerable contexts.

There are very few spaces that cultivate teachers' understandings and actions related to cultural capital. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Teacher education is mostly based on research done in non-Indigenous contexts. Teachers are often expected to use teaching practices aligned with that research even though the literature has shown this is not always effective in an Indigenous context. While cultural capital is a theory based on social class, participants in this research instead had a lot to say about Indigenous culture. In this context, class did not seem to matter as much as teacher education regarding Indigenous culture and history.

While elders stressed the importance of teachers, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, having strong cultural knowledge to teach successfully in community and public schools, the educators told a very different story regarding their own education. One young Indigenous teacher expressed her frustration because she had wanted to do a major in Native Studies but the university told her that it was not a teachable domain. She ended up doing a Bachelor of Arts to become a teacher, while taking every Native Studies course she could. Another Indigenous teacher had also taken many Native Studies courses at university. She was aware that new teachers would need to take at least one Native Studies course. However, she felt strongly that this was not enough and that the school needed more Indigenous teachers. She believed that having more Indigenous mentors and teachers for students would go a long way toward building trusting relationships with the community. Another Indigenous educator stated she had had some education regarding teaching children of different cultures, but this was not specific to Indigenous populations.

In total, 15 educators responded to the teacher education question. Twelve of those said they had had no training at all regarding Indigenous culture, knowledge, language, treaties, or history. One educator added that they were now starting to have professional learning sessions on treaty education and residential schools. These 12 educators felt very strongly about the importance of all teachers learning about Indigenous peoples' culture and history to teach not only in band-operated schools, but in all schools.

While much is being done to improve literacy, to ensure more cultural presence in the schools, and to foster parental involvement, the participants generally felt that more needs to be done. Expectations seem to be low. Safety and cultural expectations were more present for elders, parents, or caregivers. Parents and caregivers seemed to have low academic expectations for their children.

These findings show that while middle-class parents in Lareau's (2003; 2011) studies aligned their expectations and standards to the school expectations and standards, this is not the case for many middle-class Indigenous families and leaders in the communities who participated in this study. In the next chapter I discuss how my findings align with cultural capital theory. I also compare the findings with current literature and explain how these findings add to the existing literature. Finally, I present the *Education Success Map* as a way to use my findings to shape teacher education, policies, and schools.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The goal of this research was to add to the conversation on closing the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by increasing the understanding of how teachers perceive the cultural capital that First Nations parents and caregivers transfer to their children, and how these perceptions influence teaching practices, particularly practices linked to expectations. I formulated the secondary questions that guided this study to include elements of cultural capital that have proven to foster school success, regardless of ethnicity. The first of these elements is parental involvement (Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012), with a focus on parental expectations, which matter most when it comes to school success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hattie, 2009). The second element is literacy (Bodovski, 2010), which includes use of language, an element of cultural capital theory that can be a barrier to parental involvement, whether because of social class (Lareau, 2003, 2012) or ethnicity (Delpit, 2012). New categories emerged from data analysis: purpose of education, culture, and learning environment. I kept these themes because they were intertwined with the targeted elements of cultural capital (parental involvement, literacy habits, and use of language), allowing me to better understand how teachers perceived the parents' or caregivers' cultural capital and how these perceptions influenced their practices, especially academic expectations. I performed different phases of analysis to draw out patterns from interviews with elders, educators, parents, and caregivers, as well as classroom observations, documents, and memos. I organised these patterns as preliminary findings that I shared with elders and

four other participants in order to validate or adjust them. I also verified the end results of my analysis with elders and some participants.

These phases of analysis, with more and more readings by Indigenous or social justice researchers woven into each phase, were essential because as I moved forward with this research I was confronted by an uncomfortable reality. I had started this research with an open heart, but with a mind framed by biases that were to be challenged again and again along the way. My findings even challenged the generally-accepted social reproduction theory I was leaning on as a framework for this research. For example, what is missing with social reproduction and cultural capital theories is context. These theories have proven to be effective in communities that have not suffered oppression and structural racism generation after generation. In fact, my data challenged me to move beyond asking whether or not cultural capital was understood to instead examine data from the point of view of the very purpose of education. Framed by Indigenous and grounded theory methodologies, the analyzing process required me to find patterns and make meaning that would be useful to participants (Charmaz, 2006; Kovach, 2010b; Kovach, 2011). I let data lead me beyond my original questions, while always being mindful of the goal of my research. In this chapter I discuss my interpretations of the findings through the lens of expectations and cultural capital (literacy habits, use of language, and parental involvement) according to my research questions, but I also explore how culture, learning environment, and the purpose of education emerged in the voices of participants.

Although I used social reproduction theory and cultural capital theory as a framework for this research—a social class-based approach to understanding how patterns of social

advantages and disadvantages are reproduced—it quickly became apparent that ethnicity and collective historical oppression (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015) also play a part in parental practices. Not all middle-class parents or caregivers adopt concerted cultivation practices (Lareau, 2003; 2011). To make sense of this, I leaned on other education and ethnicity researchers such as Battiste (1998, 2000, 2002, 2007, 2011, 2017), Cummins (2011), Delpit (1988, 2006, 2012), Sarra (2014), St. Denis (2007) and Trudgett et al. (2017).

My analyses and readings led to this conclusion: Explaining the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the present context is complex and does not fit neatly within a cultural capital theory model. Educators generally understood families' cultural capital as not being aligned with the schools' culture, including for many middle-class families. They talked about how home life was difficult because of residential school legacy. Because of this difficult home life, they said they wanted their children to “do their best,” which conveyed low academic expectations. “Doing your best” is not working towards a specific goal and is therefore considered a low expectation (Walkey et al., 2013). While cultural capital theory stipulates that middle-class parents' cultural capital (attitudes, knowledge, skills, and values) are aligned with the school, my findings show that this is not the case for many middle-class First Nations families. Middle-class families did not necessarily adopt concerted cultivation parental practices, such as reading to child every night and being involved at school. Based on their own schooling experiences, they had low expectations for their children when it came to academic success at school. They also expressed limited expectations for the school

based on the belief that public school offers better academic teachings. While parents and caregivers in my study wanted their children to graduate, most had low academic expectations and did not actively foster their children's cognitive development as parents practicing concerted cultivation do. In an Ontario study, Milne (2017) found that middle-class Indigenous families' cultural capital is not always aligned with the school's expectations.

Despite its shortcomings in this situation, cultural capital theory allowed me to look for generally accepted evidence-based practices when it comes to school success. I examined these practices: reading to one's child, parental involvement (including their expectations), and use of language. I used the lens of elders, parents, and educators to frame these practices in a new context—band-operated schools in two Indigenous communities—which is not the context of other cultural capital theory studies. To my knowledge, my research is only the second research framed by cultural capital theory in Canada to be conducted in an Indigenous context (Milne, 2017). This will allow the expansion of conversations on effective practices and theories to include the specificities and complexities of context, in this case the Indigenous cultural landscape, the legacy of residential schools, and generations of oppression.

In the next sections I discuss how my findings relate to the research questions and to literature, and how these findings contribute to a better understanding of cultural capital theory in an Indigenous context. In the last section of this chapter I discuss the *Education Success Map* a conceptual framework that links findings together.

5.1 Cultural Capital Theory and Expectations in a First Nations Context

The research questions for this study were: *How do teachers understand the cultural capital that First Nations parents and caregivers transfer to their children and how does this understanding affect their teaching practices, particularly practices linked to expectations? What spaces are created to cultivate teachers' understandings of and actions upon cultural capital?* I chose literacy and parental involvement, including parental expectations, as the elements of cultural capital to frame this research, as they have been seen to have a positive impact on learning regardless of ethnicity (Bodovski, 2010; Epstein, 2001; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2012).

The educators I interviewed for this study generally believed that most parents or caregivers, including those from middle-class families, do not read to their children at night, do not participate in school activities, do not have a positive view of school, and have low academic expectations for their children. In cultural capital theory terms, that means that middle-class parents do not actively develop the cognitive skills that educators understand to be important for school success. While cultural capital theory (Lareau, 2003; 2011) states that middle-class parents, regardless of ethnicity, will practice concerted cultivation, my study found that ethnicity does matter. Parents, caregivers, and elders stated that they themselves did not always adopt the concerted cultivation practices mentioned above, nor did they believe all other parents do. For example, a middle-class mother did not do homework because she was too drained and tired at night. She said she was still healing from events she had experienced during her own schooling career. One elder said she never did homework with her children or grandchildren because when they

are home, it is family time, and school takes children away from their family enough as it is. Although she believed children should develop strong literacy skills, her position was that school had the children for enough hours to teach them these skills. As an elder, her position and beliefs matter in her community. These and other testimonies indicated that not all middle-class Indigenous parents practiced concerted cultivation, as they were faced with historical barriers of oppression. They also faced current barriers such as a lack of trust; participants told me schools are still perceived as the entity that reports families to social services before children are taken away. I observed that educators believed First Nations parents and caregivers did not transfer the cultural capital that they felt was necessary for school success. Moreover, parents and members of the community (e.g., the Facebook group) saw schools as a place not to be trusted and therefore did not adopt the present school's cultural capital expectations such as reading to child and being involved at the school level. Elders, who were frustrated by the lack of culture and language in the schools, viewed schools as institutions that do not value Indigenous cultural capital, including their worldviews. In the classrooms themselves, I generally observed learning environment with low expectations. Both parental expectations (Fan & Chen, 2010; Hattie, 2009) and teacher expectations (Crozier, 2009; Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) are drivers for school success.

While I observed some examples of high expectations in the classrooms, academic expectations were generally low. The teachers seemed to care about the children (e.g., giving snacks to children who had none and showing interest in their lives) and the children responded by feeling very comfortable in the classes. However, the teachers did

not express clear goals or provide specific feedback associated with high expectations (Walkey et al., 2013). I also did not observe many clearly defined learning intentions for students, which are necessary to foster success (Hattie, 2009). This was not surprising, as teachers' low expectations are aligned with the literature on expectations: Teachers tend to have lower expectations when children are from a different ethnicity or from a vulnerable environment (Blau, 2003; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). Many researchers asserted that children need high expectations so as not to limit their life opportunities (Crozier, 2009; Liou & Rojas, 2016; Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). I observed an example of low expectations regarding literacy during independent reading. Many children were not reading and the teacher did not intervene. In this situation, high expectations would mean giving children intentions for the reading and allowing time to discuss the intentions (Miller & Moss, 2013). Having said this, the educators told me there was now more structure than there had been a few years ago and results in Grade 2 literacy assessments were increasing. This indicates that expectations were rising and that education leaders and teachers were moving toward stronger school success. Educators explained this increase in results by stating that they now had specific goals and formative assessments to inform their literacy teaching. The next step on the path to school success would be for teachers to learn how to convey high expectations to children (Shulman, 1987; Weinstein, 2002), including expressing specific expectations for independent reading (Miller & Moss, 2013) and developing and acknowledging cultural identity through literacy (Cummins, 2011; Taylor, 2011).

My findings regarding culture were unexpected. They were a direct result of how participants chose to answer my questions. As I followed the thread of my interview transcriptions to look at more literature, I saw that culture needs to be part of First Nations student education if the achievement gap is to be closed. One of the goals of my research is to contribute to professional and academic conversations related to closing this gap for Indigenous children.

I found that most educators believed culture to be important but were not certain what their role should be, nor did they know how to integrate culture into their teaching. Although they shared ideas of how culture could be infused in the school and I observed teachers sometimes including cultural themes in their teaching, teachers had not been instructed to infuse culture, Indigenous knowledge, or Indigenous ways into their everyday teaching. Culture was integrated into the school plans but it was often treated as a separate item, which caused classrooms teachers to expect the culture teacher to do most of the cultural teaching. Moreover, integrating culture or teaching children from an Indigenous context was generally not part of their teacher education, nor was it generally included in curricula. I argue that by clearly articulating the purpose of education as being both academic and cultural, First Nations communities and schools could advocate for the necessary teacher learning and tools to ensure that culture is acknowledged and becomes an integral part of First Nations education. Studies have shown that Indigenous students perform better academically when culture is present in their schooling (Battiste, 2017, Colomb, 2012). My research has shown that culture also brings more parents, caregivers, and families into school, creating a space to foster parental involvement and

discuss parental expectations, which is a key element of cultural capital across ethnicities (Jeynes, 2012, 2015; Fan & Chen, 2001; Hattie, 2009). I could not therefore leave culture out of this research, even if it was not part of my original questions, as culture was a recurring theme both in discussions about parental involvement and in the literature regarding literacy, the two key elements of cultural capital chosen for this research.

Not only could I not leave culture out of my findings, I concluded that to build trust between school and parents and between school and the community, the very purpose of education needs to be commonly understood as being both academic and cultural. This common understanding can lead to closing the achievement gap. I drew this conclusion from both my data and the literature. The specificities of this understanding need to stem from discussions with elders, educators, and families of each community, and should also be framed by research both on education for Indigenous students and on effective teaching practices. These discussions need to happen before decision makers choose evidence-based solutions (e.g., strategies, teaching pedagogies, material) that might be effective at closing the achievement gap in a non-Indigenous school but for Indigenous students would end up reinforcing a school system designed by the dominant group. Cummins (2011) demonstrated that when it comes to closing the achievement gap with students from non-dominant cultural and linguistic groups, education leaders and policy makers need to take into cultural identity into consideration. He stated that children's identities must be acknowledged and woven into language and literacy used at school. Wilson (2008) also found that Indigenous students achieve better when schools recognize and accept their identity. These studies and Bourdieu's (1984) social reproduction theory

reinforce my findings that the purpose of education needs to shift to include culture if student achievement is to be increased. Bourdieu's (1984) social reproduction theory stipulates that when society takes a practice that is successful for the privileged group and tries to use it for everyone, the dominant group retains a dominant place. Elders, many educators, and most parents and caregivers told me we do not need to reproduce and reinforce the present dominant school model, but rather to take that model and shape it into a culturally safe learning environment (Cazden, 2001; MacFarlane & al., 2007; McLoughlin & Oliver, 2001), where culture and Indigenous knowledges and ways are as important as academics and where teaching methods are defined by Indigenous culture. My findings show that more parents and caregivers are involved when there is a cultural event at school. This involvement is a necessary condition to build necessary strong family-school relationships for student success (Leithwood and Riedhle, 2003). Moore (2017) talked about the importance of bringing school and student learning into the community (e.g., hatching salmon eggs in a tank in the community instead of at school) in order to create more culturally appropriate ways of learning rather than depending on Western ways of teaching and learning. These are just some examples of the bodies of research available to frame the discussions regarding how to include culture in a First Nations school model (Battiste, 2017; Colomb, 2012; MacFalane et al., 2001; Trudgett et al., 2017). The participants in my study had ideas about how to develop a culturally safe environment, from creating a room for grandparents, parents, and caregivers to asking parents and caregivers about their own expectations and building from there.

A double purpose of education—cultural and academic—makes sense because simply reproducing a practice that works for the dominant group might not be effective for another group (Bourdieu, 1984) and that the Western school model without infusion of cultural identity in literacy and language will not achieve the goal of closing the achievement gap (Battiste, 2017; Cummins, 2011; Taylor, 2011). The participants in my study knew this even though they had not read the studies. They felt more culture was needed in the school. Their reasons included, “Because it is the child’s identity” and “Because it contributes to parental involvement.”

In addition to a purpose of education that includes both academics and culture, my analysis and reading showed me that more attributes of Indigenous culture need be elevated so educators see them as cultural capital that matters within an Indigenous schooling model. Band-operated schools should not reproduce a school model based only on mainstream research and provincial curricula. This is not working: The achievement gap has actually widened in the last 15 years for Indigenous students living on reserve (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2018). Schooling for Indigenous students should be about building a school model that meets its children’s and families’ needs while upholding high expectations. Bodies of research support that Indigenous students achieve better when culture is infused in teaching (Battiste, 2017; Goulet, 2001; MacFarlane et al., 2007; St Denis, 2011; Trudgett et al., 2017) and when the learning environment is considered to be a culturally safe environment (Battiste, 2017; Colomb, 2012; MacFarlane et al., 2007). This infusion of culture into education aligns better with my findings than does cultural capital theory.

Like culture, learning environment was an unexpected finding. Participants wanted to talk about the school in terms of safety and relationships. Lareau (2003; 2011) talked about how parents and children from concerted cultivation (middle-class families) feel comfortable in a school environment because it is aligned with their home culture. This was not always the case in the schools I observed. Many educators perceived safety as being the biggest concern for parents, including middle-class parents. The parents and elders confirmed this perception. They described safety sometimes as physical safety (e.g., absence of bullying) and other times as cultural safety. An elder described cultural safety as a school that teaches and honours the relationship to self, to others, to nature, and to land. Wilson (2001) added that a culturally safe environment must also include high expectations, the second part of the main research question of this study. A culturally safe environment where relationships are key could be part of the cultural aspect of the double purpose of education for Indigenous students that fosters school success. Use of language, even when speaking the same language, is another component of building relationships. One of my secondary questions related to school communication with parents.

Cultural capital theory sees use of language as class-based (Lareau, 2003, 2011), while other researchers found it to be more about communication between different ethnic groups even when using the same language (Delpit, 1988, 2012; Kinloch & Metge, 2014). My findings regarding communication with parents and caregivers show that even middle-class parents did not always understand what Settler teachers or principals said. They would often call an Indigenous educator after a discussion to try to decode and

understand the conversation. In my research, use of language is ethnically-based and not based on social class. This is not surprising, as culture encompasses values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour, including ways of understanding the world (Smircich, 1983; Smith, Fischer, Vignoles, & Bond, 2013). Use of language is cultural in this research, as even middle-class parents often did not feel heard by a Settler teacher. My findings show that use of language matters more from an ethnic perspective than from a social class perspective (as per cultural capital theory). This is important because it adds another layer to what teachers need to learn about teaching Indigenous children. It also shows how context matters when applying theories or research-based approaches. I observed Settler educators use mostly direct language to make sure the children understood instead of what Delpit (2006; 2012) called linguistic codes used by the dominant culture and what Lareau (2003; 2011) called language of negotiation used by middle-class people. My findings show that these educators had adapted their language to respond culturally to their perceived needs of the children, whether by design or through trial and error. However, they had not adapted their use of language to meet parent and family needs, as parents, including middle-class parents, claimed they did not always understand what was expected of them during a conversation with a Settler educator. Participants talked about not feeling understood by teachers or not understanding them. They used words like “intimidated” and “angry” to describe their own feelings or how they perceived other parents felt toward the teachers and administrators. This sentiment did not only apply to low SES parents, as it does in the cultural capital model (Lareau, 2003; 2011). This is yet another example of how cultural capital theory does not fully apply in this context.

My other secondary research questions related to parental involvement and parental expectations, other key elements of cultural capital. My findings show that educators' perceptions often led them to conclude that parents are mainly concerned about their child's behaviour and safety and that many parents and caregivers are more interested in discussing bullying issues than academic issues. On the other hand, educators said that there are more parents coming to school events, which is a success. Overall, parents and caregivers are less involved in academic events, such as parent-teacher meetings, and they are more involved in cultural events organized by the school such as a mini Pow wow. Cultural events to build trust and generate more parental, family, and community involvement are also aligned with the findings of an Australian study (Trudgett et al., 2017) and with Battiste's studies (1998, 2007, 2017). These researchers also found that Indigenous parents were more involved with their children's education when the teacher was sensitive to their culture. While parents want their children to be safe at school, they do not always see school as a safe place because of the legacy of residential schools and other forms of oppression. My findings show that parents' expectations of school are more often linked to having a good day (e.g., being happy and well behaved) than to academics. Nevertheless, parent comments about wanting their children to get through school and to make something of themselves in the future show that parents and caregivers do want their children to succeed academically, as corroborated by research (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Colomb, 2012). In my research, parental non-involvement, including that of middle-class parents, seemed to stem from a mistrust of school. This mistrust of school for middle-class families is not aligned with cultural

capital theory (Lareau, 2003, 2011), where middle-class parents tend to feel comfortable and get involved.

Cultural capital is the transmission of values, skills, attitudes, and knowledge of parents to their children (Lareau, 2003, 2011). According to cultural capital theory, when the school and family cultures are aligned, children are more likely to succeed. Values and attitudes toward formal education are part of the cultural capital that is transferred by parent to child. Presently, Indigenous families who are sending their children to school are aware that a school system was responsible for destroying language and cultural identity. They are also aware that a school system was responsible for family destruction. Moreover, the tension between the teaching approaches and content at school and traditional teachings and practices at home or in the community is embedded in the different values, skills, attitudes, and knowledge of each culture. Aligning cultural capital for better achievement is more complex than standardizing child-rearing practices between social classes; it requires systematic changes by the school system to align with Indigenous culture to heal from a past where schooling was destructive (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Lareau (2011) recognized that racial profiling exists but she added that she did “not observe race-based patterns in parents’ institutional knowledge or in their management of their children’s experiences within institutions” (p. 308). Her findings show parental practices emerge from social class, not race, and that “differences in social class matter because they provide unequal advantages in key institutions” (p. 315). Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that the legal history of racial discrimination made it more difficult for

some Black middle-class families to benefit from the same advantages at school as their White middle-class counterparts even though they adopted the same parental practices. They acknowledged that historical trauma could impact even middle-class families. That same research found that middle-class Black families yield more advantages from their parental practices than the low SES Black families. Overall, Lareau (2003, 2011) found that class matters more than race.

My findings challenge the applicability of cultural capital theory in a First Nations context. Strategic action to increase achievement cannot consider social-class parental practices alone. Although more research is needed, the findings of my study suggest that ethnicity matters—especially when there is a collective destructive history in relation to education—when it comes to transmitting cultural capital that is considered important by the dominant cultural group because some middle-class families not of the dominant group encounter barriers. Other studies support my findings that ethnicity and historical barriers impact how parents and communities understand school (Battiste, 2017; Milne, 2017).

In the context of my study there is a clear history of racial oppression and of education systems destroying culture and families (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Some middle-class educators, elders, and parents are frustrated and angry at the present school system, which they see as not valuing Indigenous culture and being dominated by White culture, although more Indigenous culture is being included. At the same time, they see formal education as essential in providing individuals with choices and contributing to the thriving of community and society (Assembly of First Nations,

2010). In the view of many Indigenous people, Indigenous culture needs to shape Indigenous education (Battiste, 2017; Goulet, 2001; MacFarlane et al., 2007; Trudgett et al., 2017) instead of trying to align families with concerted cultivation practices. My findings also show that the natural growth practice of giving children time to explore outside, rather than creating busy schedules of structured activity, is a value embedded in Indigenous culture. Indigenous leaders, elders, educators (who are middle-class), and some middle-class parents would like to see outdoor exploration integrated into teaching approaches. This is not aligned with cultural capital theory, as parents practicing concerted cultivation provide many structured activities for their children. Although outdoor education is not a standard expectation in the school system at the present time, my findings show that it is a strong cultural ask from the Indigenous middle-class community. This is an example of how the very purpose of education is not aligned with concerted cultivation practices in an Indigenous community.

Overall, working with cultural capital theory in an Indigenous context proved to be difficult. My findings show that Indigenous peoples' relationship with formal education cannot be neatly compartmentalized into middle-class and low SES categories because of residential schools and other forms of oppression that still affect Indigenous peoples today. Milne (2017) arrived at the same conclusion: There is a lack of trust between Indigenous families and school systems that acts as a barrier to parental involvement, including among some middle-class families. There are Indigenous families in low SES contexts who need more support because providing basic parental care is all they can do. In some cases even basic care is not possible because residential schools made it more

difficult for intergenerational parents to develop basic parental practices. But there are also middle-class parents who do not read to their children regularly, or do not hold high academic expectations or get involved in their children's school activities. These parents do not support their child's schooling career by articulating high expectations, which shows they do not adhere to concerted cultivation practices. Furthermore, there is a tension between the expectations of the school system and the need for a culturally safe learning environment, even among leaders, elders, and some educators. Most felt very strongly that culture should be woven into the children's education.

My discussions with participants led me to believe that many Indigenous middle-class adults feel a tension between wanting their children to succeed academically and feeling that school is not a safe place, culturally and otherwise. This is because of the painful legacy that education has left their people and because they themselves have faced social discrimination during their schooling careers. While the school system increasingly includes cultural activities, it does not yet value Indigenous culture, languages, and traditional knowledges as much as Western knowledge. At the same time, the people with whom I had conversations, the documents I analyzed, my observations, and the studies I read all led to the same realization: Participants want the children to succeed. Indigenous people recognize that formal education and academic success are important, both for the child and for the well-being of the community. This tension ultimately led me to this question: *Does it have to be a choice between academic success and culture?*

After examining my findings through a cultural capital lens, I looked again at my data and at literature connected to Indigenous contexts. At the core of all expectations and

parental practices is the purpose of education. Presently, the purpose of education is a source of tension that divides the communities that participated in the study. Community-led discussions to determine common expectations of the purpose of education are the driver for success. In the recent *Indigenous Speakers Series* at the University of Ottawa, Wesley-Esquimaux (2018) spoke on the topic of Indigenous education that meets the needs of Indigenous students: “It is not about lowering expectations but about broadening thinking horizons.” Empowering First Nations schools, families, and Indigenous leaders to develop a shared vision for education could lead to more student success. A shared purpose could be the driver to develop focus areas, and then specific strategies within those focus areas, instead of developing school plans that focus on the Western view of academics, where culture is elevated to cultural capital that matters at school. A shared understanding of the purpose of education needs to begin with listening to Indigenous family and community desires, values, and knowledge. Educators need to be open to questioning habitual colonial educational practices. My research found that family and community involvement is the biggest barrier to the sharing of high expectations due to the cultural gap between school and community. Because of colonialism and the lingering effects of residential schools and racial discrimination in public schools, even some middle-class families feel this divide between school and culture.

I chose to organize my data in a conceptual framework that could contribute to a common understanding of the purpose of education. I have called this framework the *Education Success Map*. It is the result of data gathering in two Indigenous communities but it can contribute to wider discussions regarding the purpose of school in a First Nations context.

It is essential to build a commonly understood purpose of education between schools, families, elders, and the community so everyone develops a sense of ownership and belonging to the school project.

5.2 Education Success Map

The following conceptual framework is an example of what a culturally responsive approach could look like, based on the findings of this research. At the core is a common understanding that the purpose of education needs to be both academic and cultural. A key finding in this research is the importance of giving more space and more input to Indigenous peoples when it comes to education, both to build trust with families and to uphold common high expectations. It is only logical to state that it is the community that needs to define academic and cultural “success.” The *Education Success Map* needs to meet specific needs of different communities. Presently, success in education is a concept that has been defined differently by different researchers. I do not have enough data from this study to define success other than to say that it is both academic and cultural. Should academic success be about closing the achievement gap without changing the structure of the system or the curricula? Does academic success include Indigenous knowledge and worldviews? Does academic success include students’ capacity to understand, critique, and compare Western and Indigenous knowledge and worldviews? How do we define cultural success? What spaces are created for languages in school learning? Do we want students to learn about their culture or to live their culture at school? How do we know if children are learning to appreciate and live their culture? What is the role of the

community in defining success? Does community have a role? These questions could engage stakeholders in defining success.

Once all stakeholders share a common understanding that the purpose of education is both academic and cultural, and once they share a common understanding of what success looks like in these domains, they can start planning actions in the other focus areas of map.

In the other circles are the focus areas that emerged from this research. Each circle has an academic and a cultural component. This means that these focus areas are informed by academic and cultural success. Once the purpose of education is understood, the other circles also inform each other. While the first circle—a common understanding of education—remains at the centre of the model, the other focus areas could change, depending on the need of the community and students. In my research, family and community involvement clearly needs to be the first area of focus, which is why it is the focus area closest to the purpose of education. High expectations need to drive actions of all focus areas, which is why I placed it as the outside circle. Figure 3 below shows the *Education Success Map*.

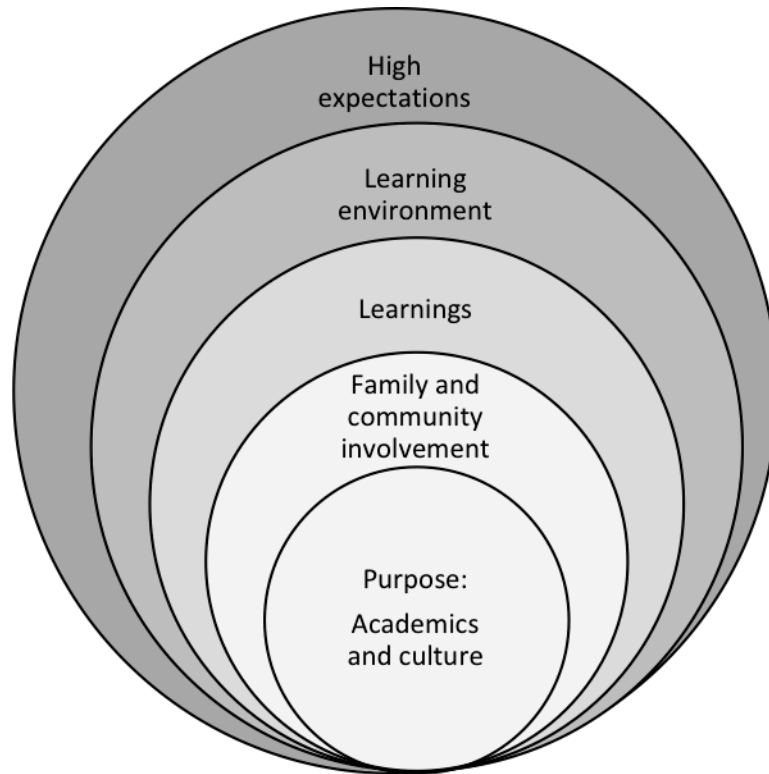


Figure 3. Education Success Map

At the core of this conceptual framework is the purpose of school in a First Nations context. It is essential to build a common understanding of purpose of education among the school, families, elders, and the community, not just for the band-operated schools that participated in this study but for all First Nation schools. This is the best way to ensure the contribution of all stakeholders and to develop a sense of ownership and belonging to the school project. In the sections that follow I present a vision for circles of the *Education Success Map* in turn, beginning with the innermost circle—the purpose of education.

5.2.1 Purpose of education

The act of articulating the purpose of education must start by recognizing the tensions that now exist, and may always exist, between the present school system and Indigenous culture. It might not be easy to find a purpose of education that acknowledges both the Western and the Indigenous worlds.

Based on my data, I wrote the following summary of the potential purpose of education in a band-operated school: *The purpose of education is to develop both academic skills and a strong cultural identity in a way that fosters a respectful relationship with the self, with others, with community, and with nature and land, so that each child may grow up physically and culturally safe, strong, and healthy, understanding how individual gifts contribute to the development of the self, to the well-being of the community, and to involvement in society.* In my study, I observed a tension between school and Indigenous culture. This was exemplified by the student who mumbled, “This is not how my people do it” and by the Indigenous teacher who corrected students when they used an Indigenous word in a sentence yet later stated she thought more native language was needed in school. Many participants talked about the need for more culture and language at school. Strong academic skills and strong cultural identity, including Indigenous language, knowledge, ways of being, and spirituality, foster an education that developments the whole child. The result is a thriving cultural community as well as individuals who contribute to society (Cormier, 2005; Landry, Allard, Deveau, & Bourgeois, 2005). The purpose of education should be written in policies, curricula, and school plans and it should be part of teacher education. The exact phrasing of this

purpose should be discussed with community, families and school, then shared as a commonly understood purpose of education that drives all expectations and standards, lifting some elements of cultural capital that parents and families transfer to their children to become the cultural capital that leads to school success.

Attributes of culture become cultural capital that matters when they “yield profits” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 598). In my research the goal is to close the achievement gap. The Assembly of First Nations (2010) stated that Indigenous peoples generally recognize formal education as a means to participate actively in society and to influence one’s own life as well as community life. I suggest that because culture contributes to stronger student achievement, and because stronger student achievement is necessary to influence one’s life and one’s community, then Indigenous culture, in a First Nations context, “yields profits” (Lareau & Weininger, 2003, p. 598). Indigenous culture should be considered cultural capital in a First Nations school, if not in all schools serving Indigenous students. Education leaders, elders, families, and the community need to discuss which attributes of culture—knowledges, values, attitudes, relationships, and skills—to include. What does it mean to be Indigenous in this community—in this place and at this time? What traditions do children need to carry forward? How will relationships and attitudes towards self, others, nature, and land serve the children, the community, and society? Who will teach what? Where will these teachings take place—at school, on the land, or in the community? These are examples of questions to guide a community in choosing the attributes of culture that become cultural capital in First Nations schools. Sarra (2014) believed that Indigenous cultural identity must be taught in

school. Without the cultural identity component, Indigenous students will be subjected to low expectations as they are taught Western knowledge in a Western context. That in itself is telling Indigenous students that they are inferior to the dominant group (Sarraf, 2014). Stelmach et al. (2008) showed how Indigenous parent expectations are different than the school's expectations, as I found in my research. Different expectations cannot lead to the parental high expectations that are important for school success (Hattie, 2009). The core of the *Education Success Map* lies in clearly making stakeholders' expectations—in this model academics and culture—the double purpose of education. While many parents and educators in my study talked about parent expectations regarding physical safety at school, Indigenous culture is so embedded in relationships (to self, others, nature, and land), as explained to me by elders, that a cultural approach to physical safety would be the most effective as it reinforces Indigenous identity, a necessary element to foster Indigenous student success (Sarraf, 2014).

Having a double purpose—academics and culture—recognizes and accepts the whole child, including his or her culture and community. Including culture in education yields stronger student achievement (Battiste, 2017; Trudgett et al., 2017). Stronger literacy skills and dispositions result when the teacher's pedagogy values student identity texts (Cummins, 2011). Once commonly understood, this purpose of education should drive actions and strategies pertaining to other focus areas. How will family and community involvement be different? What will a school day look like? What are our specific goals? How do we maintain high expectations? Where do we start? This last question is critical

because trying to change everything at once will not lead to success. Teacher training (or retraining) might be necessary along the way.

5.2.2 Family and community involvement.

Leaning on my findings and on literature, I suggest that in this model, elders, grandparents, knowledge keepers, parents, and caregivers be invited to share knowledge with the children at school. School staff value these teachings because educators understand that part of the purpose of education in their school is to include knowledges, attitudes, values, and worldviews that are necessary to children's development and to closing the achievement gap (Battiste, 2017; Trudgett et al., 2017). In this model, educators understand that in a First Nations school, culture is not only an essential component of learning and academics, but that is it intentionally and thoughtfully embedded in literacy (Battiste, 2017; Cummins, 2011) and other subjects (Battiste, 2017). Educators understand that the cultural attributes First Nations parents transfer to their children matter when it comes to learning. Professional learning is organized for teachers to align the school culture with the community's cultural capital. Teachers learn how to teach in a way that empowers students to include their cultural identity in their learning (Battiste, 2017; Cormier, 2005; Cummins, 2011; Cummins et al., 2005). Educators in my study, both Indigenous and Settler, cared deeply about the children and seemed to understand that culture is an important part of a First Nations school. However, they found it difficult to integrate culture into their everyday teaching; their teaching often differed from the teachings of the culture teacher. Teachers need more university courses

and professional learning sessions that focus on infusing teaching approaches with cultural identity and culture and on fostering parental and family involvement in an Indigenous community. With this knowledge, teachers have the potential to create an even richer learning environment that is conducive to parental involvement, including parental high expectations lead to school success (Hattie, 2009).

My findings show that events are presently organized in collaboration with families and the community and that more parents participate when there is a cultural event. That is a great starting point for nurturing parental and family involvement. My participants had even more ideas about how to foster more parental and family involvement. This indicates that educators, parents, and elders care deeply for the children, as they have thought a lot about the importance of parental involvement and how to improve it. The following suggestions from participants can structure discussions about strategies to promote more parental involvement:

- School staff could participate in cultural events or in community events outside the school to meet and interact with parents and extended family members
- Teachers could meet parents outside school grounds before meeting the children
- Communities could increase support mechanisms, such as a liaison or coach going to homes, for families who need to learn parenting skills
- Schools could establish a room to welcome parents where discussions build relationships between parents, elders, and caregivers and are not necessarily only about academics

These suggestions are very important and would have to be done with great care, considering the fear expressed by participants that the education system is part of the institution that can remove children from their home. The purpose of school is shared often with community and families and academic issues are addressed with parents once trust is established through a respectful relationship. Parental and family involvement is important for school success (Jeynes, 2012, 2005; Fan & Chen, 2001) and culture has to be a part of improving parental and family involvement (Milne, 2017). This is why the circle of Family and Community Involvement comes before and revolves around the circle dedicated to culture and academics in the *Education Success Map*.

5.2.3 Learnings

In the *Education Success Map* I have grouped together the findings related to cultural learnings and teachings at school with the category of analysis called *academics*. Together, these become the circle called *Learnings* in recognition that culture and academics are the dual purpose of education. This expands the category I called *academics* in my initial findings. The theme *Learnings* also suggests that there is room for students to “invest their identity in the learning process” (Cummins et al., 2005, p. 8) and thus blend culture and academics. The academic focus of my research was primarily on literacy because literacy is a key element of cultural capital theory that has an impact across ethnicities (Bodovski, 2010). For this reason, the focus in the *Learnings* circle will be on embedding literacy and culture in the teaching and learning process. For example, one participant in this study spoke of how literacy has always been part of Indigenous culture, from oral storytelling to reading nature. Reading and understanding nature could

be integrated to the definition of literacy that is taught in a First Nations context, which would respect and value Indigenous culture (Battiste, 2017; Sarra, 2014). Oral literacy is part of the present definition of literacy at school. Oral literacy can support reading by intentionally using fluency and comprehension instructional techniques (Lems, Miller & Soro, 2009; Ouellette & Beers, 2010). Oral literacy can also support writing in effective shared, guided, and independent writing practices (Flynn, 2007; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014). Educators in the classes I observed said that they are increasingly using books that refer to Indigenous peoples and are authored and illustrated by Indigenous authors, although not as much as they wished because they mostly used leveled books. In a context where culture is also a purpose of education, teachers could feel more at ease using and co-creating more Indigenous books.

Educators could cultivate writing to have children produce identity texts, both in English (present language of instruction) and their native language (Taylor & Cummins, 2011). Identity texts are one way for children to feel that their identity is recognized and accepted in their school, increasing their engagement and achievement (Cummins, 2011; Taylor, 2011). In a First Nations school, students could also learn to write or speak in their language. Identity texts are called identity texts not because they speak about identity but because they put the child's identity—in this case Indigenous language and ways of expression—alongside the prescribed language of the curriculum. In fact, curricula that integrate culturally responsive teachings (Gay, 2010; Hammond, 2015; Villegas & Lucas, 2002) should underscore the importance of identity texts. These texts—written, oral, musical, visual, or a combination—accentuate students' identity and

give students a sense that they can create and experience representations of who they are in a school (Taylor & Cummins, 2011). Taylor and Cummins (2011) said identity texts are especially important for Indigenous students because their parents or grandparents lived at a time when language was forbidden and Indigenous culture was represented in a negative way at school and in society. This is aligned with my findings; some parents in the community spoke of school as a system that they associated with cultural destruction and racial oppression. With more culture present within academic teachings, including literacy, this view of education could change. Participants in this research stated that they wanted more students to succeed. Research corroborates this (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Colomb, 2012). Battiste (2017) and Trudgett et al., (2017) stated that Indigenous students achieve better when culture is present and recognized as important in school. Cummins (2011) advocated that policies need to take into account identity if achievement is to improve for students not part of the dominant group. He said no research has proven that policies that have left out the identity component are effective when it comes to closing the achievement gap. On the other hand, Bodovski (2010) said that literacy habits, such as parents reading to their child, do have an impact regardless of ethnicity. But for this to happen, educators or others need to convince parents to read to their child. Culturally significant texts or student-created identity texts could be a way into this conversation. In the communities where I conducted research, there was a wide gap between families and school, (e.g., the negative Facebook groups, people calling the school system a “white system”, and the non-involvement from even middle-class families) which made it difficult to encourage parents and caregivers to read to their children every day. Other types of literacies, such as oral literacy, should be encouraged

at home as they are also important for reading and writing success (Flynn, 2007; Grabe & Kaplan, 2014; Lems et al., 2009; Ouellette & Beers, 2010). Before this can happen, trust needs to be established. Both in my study and in Milne's (2017), also conducted in an Indigenous context, there was mistrust between families and the school.

Cultural capital theory (Lareau, 2003, 2011) states that children achieve better when their home culture is aligned with the school culture. Presently, the dominant culture influences the school culture, even in a band-operated school, even though participants stated that more Indigenous culture had been present in their school in recent years. But when a school is in a First Nations community, I argue that the school culture should be closer to the community culture, nurturing the alignment of cultural capital that fosters school success. This is especially important because cultural identity increases student success (Battiste, 2017; Cummins, 2011; Hammond, 2015; Trudgett et al., 2017). In other words, even when it comes to academics and curriculum, cultural identity needs to be part of the strategy to close the achievement gap.

Although I focused more on literacy in my research, participants mentioned that outdoor education seemed to meet their students' cultural and academic needs in a pilot project that was happening in both schools. As education leaders use the *Education Success Map*, they can explore other teaching approaches or adaptations of effective teaching approaches that will lead to both academic success and cultural development, the double purpose of education. This will provide an opportunity to close the achievement gap, as cultural identity seems key for improved achievement (Battiste, 2018; Colomb, 2012; Cummins, 2011; Taylor, 2011). What we are doing now is not working (Office of

Auditor General of Canada, 2018). I believe it is time to look beyond general effective teaching practices to examine what culturally responsive teaching means in a First Nations context.

Through collective professional learning, teachers can develop highly effective teaching approaches that meet Indigenous students' cultural and academic needs. Effective teaching will give students the academic skills to meet expectations and standards of society at large, equip them to participate in decision-making that affects their communities, and provide them personal choices in life, all the while developing a stronger sense of their cultural identity (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Colomb, 2012; Laramee, 2008). Learning needs to happen in an environment conducive to meeting these goals. In the next section I explore that environment.

5.2.4 Learning environment.

The *Education Success Map* addresses parental, educators', and elders' concerns over cultural, physical, emotional, and social safety through the building of relationships and cultural respect. Elders who participated in my research were adamant that relationships are key to creating a safe environment. Relationships to self, to others, to nature, and to land (embedded in Indigenous culture) need to be part of education as a cultural component that can be seen and felt in the school environment (Battiste, 2017; Sarra, 2014; Trudgett et al. 2017). While participants in my study felt that more was being done culturally in both schools, elders expressed that it was time to go beyond separated activities, such as making dream catchers or a mini Pow wow, to create a learning

environment embedded in Indigenous knowledges, language, values, and attitudes, where every school day is aligned with culture.

When I linked elders' statements to other findings, I realized that one of the elements of culture that could change the learning environment into a culturally safe environment is the use of language. This includes communicating in a way that is mutually understood and infusing Indigenous language in the classroom. My findings show that some parents, even middle-class parents, did not understand the messages Settler educators were trying to convey, which left them frustrated and angry. This is aligned with studies that found that there are often gaps of understanding between teachers and parents, even when speaking the same language, when teachers are teaching children of another culture (Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 2012). Cazden (2001) went on to say that a good interpersonal environment includes relationships with children and their families that sometimes require teachers to step away from their own ways of communicating and of doing things to embrace and include the culture and the ways of communicating of the community. Only in this way can they build strong relationships that produce a learning environment that respects culture and is conducive to student success.

In cultural capital theory (Lareau, 2001, 2011), middle-class parents, regardless of ethnicity, feel comfortable at school. This was not the case in my study. Children of all social classes were not as comfortable in school as they should be. Cultural capital theory is nevertheless useful in my research as it stipulates that when home and school cultures are not aligned, children are not as comfortable in school. It is important to align the children's learning environment to the community's culture.

The *Learning Environment* area of the *Education Success Map* should be guided by relationships as defined by the elders in this study, including use of language (Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 2012) that is culturally understood. The physical learning environment should also be a point of discussion, as participants mentioned that children learn better and are happier outdoors, learning from land. Education leaders, elders, families, and communities can let the following questions guide their discussions about how to structure the learning environments for their children: Should we do some teachings in the community or outside? Which ones? What kind of teacher learning do we need to do that? What teachings should parents or elders do? What elements of culture do we want to see in our learning environments? What does it mean, leaning on traditional understandings of relationships, to make school physically and culturally safe? What kind of professional/cultural learning do teachers need to do that? How do we (re)organize the curriculum to make sure the learning environment is culturally responsive? Of course, academics are also important (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Colomb, 2012; Lamaree, 2008) and chosen strategies and actions need to be looked at from the academic angle as well.

For this to happen, teacher education—both during initial preparation and beyond—needs to include more learnings regarding Indigenous culture, how to integrate and welcome students’ expression of that culture in their teachings, and why it is important that elders or other community members also be included in teaching. The learning environment must also include high expectations.

5.2.5 High cultural and academic expectations.

In the *Education Success Map*, expectation is the focus area that overarches all other areas. Policies, plans, strategies, or actions to address the other areas of the map will not yield results if stakeholders do not uphold agreed-upon high expectations for both cultural and academic goals. In my research, both parents and educators had generally low expectations for children's learning and of the school in general. For parents and families, low expectations seemed to stem from a history of oppression and their own negative schooling experiences. Educators need to create trusting relationships with parents, families, and the community by bringing more culture to children's learning (Milne, 2017). Once that trust is established, it becomes easier to discuss academic expectations. Siraj-Blatchford (2010) stated that parents get more involved once they believe that their child has the same potential as any other child. Since parental expectations are very important when it comes to student success (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hattie, 2009) and there is mistrust towards school because of a history of oppression, building strong relationships with families and the community is essential to fostering parental high expectations. Once that trust is strong, it will be easier to discuss literacy habits—an element of cultural capital that has an impact across ethnicities (Bodovski, 2010)—with families and the community.

Educators also need to convey high expectations. In my study, expectations were generally low, even if teachers seem to have a good relationship with their students. I heard a lot of “I want them to do their best.” Expecting children “to do their best” is considered a low expectation, as this does not convey specific goals the child needs to meet or the ways in which educators will provide tight support to those goals (Walkey et

al., 2013). Creating a climate of high expectations is an achievable goal. A good starting point in classrooms would be to state a specific learning goal to children before teaching a lesson and give specific feedback to children's thinking and strategies (Ambady & Rosenthal, 1992; Hattie, 2009).

Expectations are a driver for achievement (Brophy, 1983; Timperley & Phillips, 2003; Weinstein, 2002). "If teachers and schools are going to have expectations, make them challenging, appropriate, and checkable such as all students are achieving what is deemed valuable" (Hattie, 2009, p. 124). Education leaders, elders, and families need to discuss and define what is valuable, how to make expectations challenging and appropriate, and how they will know that they are maintaining high expectations. They should ask: What does maintaining high expectations look like in daily pedagogy and parenting?

Teachers need to receive professional learning about how to uphold high expectations in a cross-cultural situation. For example, classroom teachers could collaborate with language and culture teachers to align expectations for using identity texts (Cummings, 2011; Taylor, 2011) as a strategy to develop literacy skills in a cross-cultural context.

Teachers would also need to understand what it means to teach in a learning environment that recognizes the double purpose of education—culture and academics.

Table 8 summarizes the *Education Success Map* by gathering the focus areas, examples of actions suggested by participants, and possible questions to lead discussions.

Table 8. *Education Success Map*

FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS	QUESTIONS TO LEAD DISCUSSIONS
Purpose of education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural education • Academic education • Teacher learning regarding culture • Cultural and academic purpose of education should be in policies and documents (e.g., school plan, curricula) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How will we adapt curricula to our needs? • How will we infuse culture in our teachings? • What teacher learnings do we need? • What do we want the children to know once they leave the school?
Family and community involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher learning regarding linguistic codes • Liaison person between school and homes • Informal gatherings at school • Cultural family events at school • Meeting parents before school starts • Teacher participation in community events • Family room at school • More teachings from community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you expect for your child from the school? (to elders, parents, and caregivers) • What are your dreams for your child? (to parents and caregivers) • What can we do to strengthen the school's relationship to parents, caregivers, and the community? • Who can guide us as we build these relationships?
Learnings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear academic goals • Clear cultural goals • Teacher learning on culturally responsive pedagogies • More oral learning in reading and writing • More resources by Indigenous authors and about Indigenous peoples 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we want the children to learn? • Do we want the children to learn about culture or to live their culture? • How do we determine learning goals?

FOCUS AREA	ACTIONS	QUESTIONS TO LEAD DISCUSSIONS
Learning environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating culturally safe environments • More resources by Indigenous authors and about Indigenous peoples • Teacher learning about culturally responsive pedagogies and learning environments • Understanding each other's linguistic codes • Indigenous cultures, languages, knowledges, and worldviews are respected and valued 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should some teachings be done in the community? • Should some teachings be done outdoors? Which ones? • What teachings could elders or family members do? • What elements of culture do we want to see in our school? • Where does the language fit in?
High expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask parents and caregivers about their expectations for their children and the school • Develop strong relationships with parents and families to discuss expectations • Elaborate clear academic and cultural goals • Maintain those goals • Teacher learning on high expectations in a cross-cultural setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you want from the school for your child? • What dreams do you have for your child? • How do we make academic expectations challenging and appropriate? • Who can contribute to the realization of our cultural expectations? • How do we maintain high expectations?

5.3 Next Steps and Future Studies

More research needs to be done to fully understand how to close the achievement gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. Future studies need to be conducted with the awareness that strategies that have proven to be effective in a Western context may not be as effective in an Indigenous context (Hammond, 2015; Trudgett et

al., 2017). Researchers need to be mindful that the very concept of an achievement gap can hinder, rather than contribute to, student success (Dixon-Román & Gutiérrez, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2007). Moreover, these studies need to consider how the impacts of intergenerational historical trauma influence expectations. Although this was not a direct part of my research, it is a good place to start, as we know that communities that have had more children taken away to residential schools have a lower graduation rate (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Before schools can implement effective culturally responsive teaching strategies, there needs to be an authentic space to hear Indigenous voices. Decision makers of every level need to acknowledge that the current school system does not fully recognize the cultural identity of the children it is serving; both the current education system and teacher education system define expectations and standards of parental involvement according to dominant White middle-class norms. While cultural capital theory looks at social class as a lens to understand why some children perform better at school and how to best create mechanisms to support low SES families, it cannot be applied in First Nations context until community healing has taken place and a strong relationship between the school and families and community is established. Middle-class Indigenous families do not practice concerted cultivation. This is important because social reproduction and cultural capital theories have framed many educational studies. But in this context, the barriers to family involvement, to having high expectations, and to closing the achievement gap need to be understood not only from the point of view of social class or of the traditional White school system (Battiste, 2017) but through a lens that encompasses both academic

expectations and Indigenous holistic education expectations. This understanding cannot happen without giving Indigenous voices and studies a valid place at decision-making tables. They are the people who carry the legacy of oppression and residential schools. They are the people who know what the purpose of education should be for their children (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

I conducted this study only in two band-operated schools in two First Nations communities. More research needs to be done to better understand how to integrate culture successfully with academics and to examine the resulting impacts on student achievement and parental involvement. For example, what specifically is meant by culture for a community? How can culture be integrated into everyday learning? More research is needed to develop explicit models of how to build trust with parents and families and how to make sure curricula promote culturally appropriate approaches, values, and knowledge. More research is also needed to better understand how to effectively equip teachers to be successful and culturally responsive educators in Indigenous contexts.

More research is also needed to better understand how to equip teachers to be culturally responsive in Indigenous contexts. Schools and educators in Indigenous communities need to discuss my proposed *Education Success Map* so they can adjust it to provide a comprehensive pathway to student success. Finally, there needs to be research to examine how decisions are made, how policies are written, and whose research is being used to justify decisions related to Indigenous education.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

I used grounded theory and Indigenous methodologies to conduct this research. The findings arose from my analysis of semi-structured interviews with 32 participants (20 educators, 3 elders, and 9 parents), 21 classroom observations, and documents such as school policies and school annual plans. I collected the data in two First Nations communities in New Brunswick. Social reproduction theory and cultural capital theory framed the theoretical context of this research. The questionnaire was structured around the elements of cultural capital that matter when it comes to school success, regardless of ethnicity: reading to the child at home and parental involvement (Bodovski, 2010; Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2012), including parental expectations (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hattie, 2009). I also studied the use of language, as it is a key element of cultural capital theory (Lareau, 2003, 2011) and studies has shown that even if parents and teachers speak the same language, in this case English, there can be gaps in understanding when teachers are teaching children not of their culture (Cazden, 2001; Delpit, 2012). New categories emerged as the analysis progressed: culture, learning environment, and the purpose of education.

The goal of this research was to provide findings and new insights that contribute to the conversation regarding closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, a gap that is widening (Office of Auditor General of Canada, 2018). My findings can frame professional learning for teachers and curriculum development. My findings can also contribute to more effective decision-making for education leaders, policy makers,

and community and educational decision makers. They can write policies and choose strategies that are effective in an Indigenous context rather than only in the context of the dominant cultural group (Battiste, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Gillies, 2005). Finally, my findings can support Indigenous leaders as they advocate for a more effective education for their children by ensuring that culture is part of that education, as students are more successful when their cultural identity is embedded in teachings (Kanu, 2007; Sarra, 2014; Trudgett et al., 2017). For educators teaching in Indigenous schools, my findings provide a pathway to student success: holding high expectations with respect to a redefined purpose of education, asking for more professional learning on culturally responsive teaching strategies, and creating a culturally safe environment. Finally, my findings highlight what some educators already know—the importance of participating in community events and organising informal events at the school to build trusting relationships with families and the community.

The main question in my study led to the finding that educators generally understand that the cultural capital that parents and caregivers transfer to their children is not aligned with the school's standards and expectations. Parents and caregivers generally do not read to children and are generally not involved in schools, nor do they hold or prioritize high academic expectations. In turn, educators' understanding of families' situations and priorities seems to lead to low teacher expectations. When it comes to use of language, Settler teachers do not seem to be aware that there is a "silenced dialogue" (Delpit, 2012), although they are aware that parents or caregivers do not seem to want to discuss

academics and literacy. Educators and parents both confirmed that some middle-class parents' cultural capital is not aligned with the school's culture.

In cultural capital theory, Lareau (2003, 2011) indicated that use of language is determined by social class, leading to low SES parents feeling frustrated with institutions such as school. Although I used social reproduction theory and cultural capital theory as a framework for this research—a social class-based approach to understanding how patterns of social advantages and disadvantages are reproduced—it is apparent that ethnicity and collective historical oppression played a part in parental practices, meaning that not all middle-class parents and caregivers adopted concerted cultivation practices (Lareau, 2003, 2011). When it comes to cultural capital, I found that ethnicity seems more important than the social-class, just as it was in Milne's (2017) research.

The disconnect between what cultural capital theory predicts about middle-class families' practices and my findings is an important point. Many band-operated schools in Canada, including the schools that participated in this study, use provincial curricula and Western school models. My findings suggest that if the achievement gap is to be closed, there is an urgent need to examine and adapt or redesign the model of schooling, teaching approaches and strategies, and curricula in order to ensure that they respect cultural identity. Schools must not continue the current trend of encouraging First Nations families and children to adopt mainstream cultural capital practices (Battiste, 2017; Freire, 1970; Gillies, 2005).

In parallel, elders, educators, and parents have expressed the need for more culture at school so children can recognize themselves and know that their identity has value. Researchers agree that cultural identity needs to be integrated into learning in order to address the achievement gap issue (Battiste, 2017; Cummins, 2011; Taylor, 2011). As schools learn to nurture a double purpose of education that all stakeholders understand to be a combination of academics and culture, they will start to value cultural capital that includes Indigenous knowledges, values, attitudes, and skills. My findings show that parents, caregivers, and community members are more present at school during cultural events. Culture could be the gateway to creating the trusting relationships between school and families (Milne, 2017). It is easier to foster high parental expectations once the relationship has been built (Siraj-Blatchford, 2010). Educators' use of language then becomes a tool for communication rather than another source of disconnection with parents and caregivers. It is easier for students to succeed when their identity is expressed, recognized, and accepted as part of their learning at school (Cummins, 2011; Sarra, 2014, Taylor, 2011). In other words, the focus needs to be on closing the cultural gap between home and school along with closing the achievement gap. Teacher learning needs to include culturally responsive teaching to be able to close both gaps.

A clearly understood purpose of education that values cultural and academic goals within an environment that nurtures trusting relationships with families is more conducive to high expectations. The two schools in this research are moving in that direction. They now have culture teachers, language classes, and more cultural activities. They also have more literacy, numeracy, and science nights with parents and families than a few years

ago. All these actions have generated stronger relationships with families. Still, the achievement gap remains an issue. The *Education Success Map* I have proposed provides a framework for a double purpose education where culture and academics are key.

In the cultural capital model (Lareau, 2003) there is an underlying assumption that the purpose of education—academic success—is the same for everyone and that middle-class parents of every ethnicity adhere to concerted cultivation. This assumption leads to systems that encourage families to align their practices with concerted cultivation instead of questioning whether the present school structure is the best system for all children (Battiste, 2017; Hammond, 2015; Gillies, 2005). This leads decision-makers to implement teaching strategies that may have no evidence of being effective in an Indigenous context (Trudgett et al., 2017) and that do not consider the environment in which Indigenous children learn best (Battiste, 2017; Colomb, 2012; MacFarlane et al., 2001; Trudgett et al., 2017) or a curriculum that focuses on identity-based literacy (Cummins, 2011; Taylor, 2011).

Closing the achievement gap is a valid goal, one that Indigenous and Settler leaders alike work hard to meet (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Colomb, 2012). My findings indicate that simply supporting children and their families with mechanisms aligned with concerted cultivation practices will probably fail because these practices are embedded in the dominant culture, which is a system that has generated many negative and abusive experiences for Indigenous peoples. Only if these mechanisms are structured and shaped by Indigenous culture do they stand a better of chance of success (Battiste, 2017; St. Denis, 2007). Lamaree (2008) found that it is possible to develop an Indigenous

education vision and a plan for implementing that vision through productive discussions and collaboration with stakeholders of the school, including parents and community leaders. She said this allows Indigenous families and the community to experience “genuine involvement in their school’s learning community through contribution and collaboration” (p. 72), leading to more trusting relationships.

Cultural capital theory stipulates that when children’s home culture is aligned with school culture it is easier for these children to succeed. In a band-operated school, children could gain that same advantage by aligning the school culture to the community’s culture and by defining education as having a double purpose: academics and culture.

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Appendix A - Letter to Educators and Elders

DATE

To educator of [name of school] or To elder

Understanding teachers' expectations through a cultural capital lens in a First Nations context: Home culture and school culture, how are they different?

My name is H  l  ne Devarenes and I am an Education Ph.D. student at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton (NB). You are invited to take part in this research project, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. The project is called, **“Understanding teachers' expectations through a cultural capital lens in a First Nations context”**. The research ethics have been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of UNB and also has the approval of your community Review Committee.

The goal of this project is to better understand the attitudes, skills and values (cultural capital) that are important to Indigenous families; to better understand how schools are aligned or are not aligned with First Nations attitudes, skills and values; and how this alignment or non-alignment influences academic success.

If you choose to take part in this project, you will be asked to take part in a talking circle (one to two hours) and have a short individual discussion with me (20 to 30 minutes).

This would take place during the school year of 2016-2017. I could also communicate with you at a later date, during the following year, to validate my interpretations of our conversations. I will be recording (audio) our conversations and talking circles to refer to them at a later date. We will discuss themes such as literacy, language, expectations.

These talking circles and individual discussions will take place at your school. In addition, I could conduct observation sessions in your classroom if you are a classroom teacher: 4 to 5 days (fall 2016), 3 days (winter 2017) and 2 days (spring 2017). The purpose of these observations are to better understand how the cultural capital that First Nations parents and caregivers transfer to their children may or may not be present in a Western school model. These observations will not be audio or video recorded. I will be talking to the children about topics such as what they are reading and their favorite things in school. If you choose to participate, you may withdraw from this research at any time. For the purpose of this research, no identifiable information will be collected.

Confidentiality will be respected and neither names nor locations will be used. All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and will be coded so that you remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely in locked drawers of a filing cabinet while the research is on-going and then it will be destroyed.

The information will be presented in a dissertation and in articles, in which your identity will not be revealed. I will invite you to a presentation of the final draft. For the teaching staff, this presentation could be a professional development session for your school, should you request it. This presentation will be held in your community. You may also be sent a summary of the final report on request.

The findings of this research could help communities and parents advocate for children, both in Band operated schools and public schools. The findings could also help create teacher professional development modules and policies that focus on how to meet the educational needs of Indigenous children and their families.

You may communicate with me if you have questions regarding this research project at 506-530-4547 or helene.devarennnes@unb.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to UNB Research Ethics Board at ethics@unb.ca. If you wish to speak to someone about my research, please contact my supervisors, Dr. Paula Kristmanson-pkristma@unb.ca or Dr. Sherry Rose-srose@unb.ca or the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. David Wagner- dwagner@unb.ca.

Sincerely,

Hélène Devarennnes

Appendix B - Participant Consent Form

CONSENT FORM

Understanding teachers' expectations through a cultural capital lens in a First Nations context: Home culture and school culture, how are they different?

Participant statement and signature:

I have read and understand both the information letter and the consent form for this study. The researcher (Hélène Devarennnes) has explained the research and answered my questions. I have been given sufficient time to consider the above information and to seek advice if I chose to do so. I know I can withdraw from this research at any time. I am voluntarily signing this form. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information. If at any time I have further questions, problems or adverse events, I can contact the school or one of the following person:

Hélène Devarennnes
Ph.D. student
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton (NB)
E3B 5A3
Phone: 506-530-4547
Email: helene.devarennnes@unb.ca

Dr. Paula Kristmanson (supervisor)
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Dr. David Wagner,
Associate Dean Graduate Studies
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton (NB)
E3B 5A3
Phone: 506-447-3294
Email : dwagner@unb.ca

If I have questions regarding my rights as a participant I can contact

Renée Audet-Martel, REB Coordinator, at ethics@unb.ca or Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies – dwagner@unb.ca

By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this research.

Participant (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____
Witness: _____ Date: _____

___ I would like to receive a copy of the findings. Please send it to the following email address _____

Appendix C - Letter to Parents and Caregivers

Date

To parents or caregivers of children in grade -- class at --- school

My name is H el ene Devarenn es and I am an Education Ph.D. student at the University of New Brunswick, Fredericton (NB). You are invited to allow your child take part in this research project, which I am conducting as part of the requirements of my degree. The research ethics have been reviewed and approved by the Research Ethics Board of UNB and also has the approval of your community Ethic Review Committee

The goal of this project is to better understand the attitudes, skills and values that are important to Indigenous families regarding literacy, parental involvement and expectations. I will also look at how the attitudes, skills and values of the school regarding literacy, parental involvement and expectations. I will then examine if these attitudes, skills and values are aligned and how they impact school success. In other words, is there a gap between home and school culture?

I will be conducting observation sessions in your child's classroom: 4 to 5 days (winter 2017) and 2 days (spring 2017). The purpose of these observations is to better understand how children perceive literacy and understand their expectations of school. These observations will not be audio or video recorded. I will be speaking to the children in the classroom during these observations. I will speak to them about topics such as what they are reading, what they like or do not like about learning in school. If you agree that your child can participate in this project, you can still choose to change your mind later and decide that your child no longer participate in this study.

When I present and publish my research, I will not share any personal information about the children and I will not use their names or the location of their school. All information collected during the research project will be treated confidentially and participants will remain anonymous. All data collected will be stored securely in locked drawers of a filing cabinet while the research is on-going and then it will be destroyed. I will invite parents and caregivers to a presentation of the final draft at the school or at the Band office. This presentation will be held in your community. You may also be sent a summary of the final report upon request.

The findings of this research could help communities and parents advocate for children, both in Band operated schools and public schools. The findings could also provide education leaders with a better understanding on how to meet the educational needs of Indigenous children and their families.

You may communicate with me if you have questions at 506-530-4547 or helene.devarennnes@unb.ca. Any ethical concerns about the study may be directed to UNB Research Ethics Board at ethics@unb.ca. If you wish to speak to someone about my research, please contact my supervisors, Dr. Paula Kristmanson- pkristma@unb.ca or [Dr. Sherry Rose- srose@unb.ca](mailto:Dr.SherryRose-srose@unb.ca) or the Associate Dean of Graduate Studies, Dr. David Wagner-dwagner@unb.ca.

Sincerely,

H el ene Devarenn es

Appendix D - Parent/Caregiver Consent Form

Understanding teachers' expectations through a cultural capital lens in a First Nations context: Home culture and school culture, how are they different?

Participant parent or caregiver statement and signature:

I have read and understand both the information letter and the consent form for this study. The researcher (Hélène Devarenes) has explained the research and answered my questions. I have been given sufficient time to consider the above information and to seek advice if I chose to do so. I know I can withdraw from this research at any time. I am voluntarily signing this form. I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information. If at any time I have further questions, problems or adverse events, I can contact the school or one of the following person:

Hélène Devarenes
PhD student
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Phone: 506-530-4547
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Dr. Paula Kristmanson (supervisor)
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Dr. Sherry Rose (supervisor)
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Dr. David Wagner,
Associate Dean of Graduate
University of New Brunswick
Fredericton (NB)
E3B 5A3
Phone: 506-447-3294
Email : dwagner@unb.ca

If I have questions regarding my rights as a parent or caregiver of a child participating in a research I can contact

Renée Audet-Martel, REB Coordinator, at ethics@unb.ca or Dr. David Wagner, Associate Dean of Graduate Studies – dwagner@unb.ca

By signing this consent form, I am indicating that I agree to my child participating in this study.

Child's name (please print): _____ Date: _____

Parent or caregiver name (please print): _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____

_____ I would like to receive a copy of the findings. Please send it to the following email address _____

Curriculum Vitae

Candidate's full name: Marie H  l  ne Pauline Devarennnes

Universities attended:

Universit   de Moncton, 1981-1985, Bachelor of Education

Universit   de Moncton, 2005-2007, Master of Environmental Studies (Interdisciplinary Studies)

Publications:

Basque, M., Sylvain, G., & advisors (Devarennnes, H. et al.), (2006). In R. Chiasson (Ed.), *Acadiens et Acadiennes du Nouveau-Brunswick*. Fredericton, NB: Minist  re de l'  ducation du N.-B.

Chouinard, O. Devarennnes, H., Cao, H. & Forgues, E. (2008). Society and identity in the face of territorial challenges: Lessons learned from minorities in a rural region of Atlantic Canada, In C. Huhua (Ed.), *Inclusion and Harmony: Improving Mutual Understanding of Development in Minority Region* (published in English and Mandarin) (chapter 18). Ottawa University and Chengyi Z, Hainan Normal University, China: Ethnic Publishing House.

Chouinard, O., Devarennnes, H., & Martin, G. (2007). Le d  veloppement local dans une communaut   en milieu minoritaire au Nouveau-Brunswick : le cas de Neguac dans l'estuaire de la Miramichi. In M. Paqu  t & S. Savard (Eds.), *Balises et r  f  rences. Acadie, francophonies* (pp. 349-368). Qu  bec: Les presses de l'Universit   de Laval.

Devarennnes, H. (1999). *Les tr  sors de la plage*. Moncton, NB:   ditions d'Acadie.

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Devarennnes, H. (1999). *Quand les patins boudent*. Moncton, NB:   ditions d'Acadie.

Devarennnes, H. (1999). *Une journ  e aux r  gates*. Moncton, NB:   ditions d'Acadie.

Devarennnes, H. (2016). *Le chandail de Ch  ticamp*. Moncton, NB:   ditions Bouton d'Or Acadie.

Devarennnes, H. (2017). R  ussite en litt  rature et le capital culturel, *Revue   ducation et Francophonie*. Automne 2017, 214-233.

Devarennnes, H. (2018). *Une journ  e poney*. Moncton, NB:   ditions Bouton d'Or Acadie.

Devarennnes, H., & Chouinard, O., (2005). *Governance and Social Cohesion in the New Rural Economy: Canadian Experiences and Future Perspectives*. Shanghai : ECAS 4 : Shanghai: The Future of Asia.

Devarennnes, H., Chouinard, O., & Forgues, É., (2006). *Social Capital Mobilization in the Face of Territorial Challenges: Lessons learned from the rural territory of Neguac-Alnwick, N. B. Canada*. Salvador : X Coloquio Internacional Sobre Poder Local Internacianal.

Devarennnes, H. (2017). *Réussite en littératie et le capital culturel*, Revue Éducation et francophonie. Automne 2017, pages 214-233.

Conference Presentations:

- 2014 *Cultural notions and school success*.
Graduate Research Conference, Fredericton: University of New Brunswick, Fredericton
- 2014 *Disentangling different cultural concepts to understand how cultural resources are rooted in each child and how these resources support or not early learning years*. Jyvaskyla, Finland: EARLI SIG 5 Conference.
- 2014 *Mieux comprendre comment les ressources culturelles enracinées dans chaque enfant influencent sa réussite éducative*. Colloque provinciale sur les identités linguistiques, Université de Moncton, Moncton.
- 2015 *Grounded theory and Indigenous methodologies: What are they?*
WIPS (Work in Progress Session), University of New Brunswick, Fredericton
- 2016 *Indigenous education in New Brunswick*
World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education, Toronto, Ontario
- 2016 *Aboriginal people: Roots and resilience*, (With Linda Gray)
Undergraduate Class Workshop, University of Iceland, Reykjavik
- 2017 *Éducation autochtone et nos écoles*
Superintendants and education directors leadership conference, CFORP (Centre Franco-Ontarien de Ressources Pédagogiques), Ottawa
- 2018 *Families in a vulnerable context and early childhood services*
Cours d'été international relatif aux droits de l'enfant, Université de Moncton
- 2018 *Supporting vulnerable families in early childhood agencies*
Early Childhood Development Association Provincial Conference, Prince Edward Island

2018 *Réconciliation avec les peuples autochtones: liens avec la francophonie en milieu minoritaire*, Stages de l'ACELF, Québec

2018 *On se parle mais nos filtres culturels brouillent les messages!*
Congrès national de l'ACELF, Moncton