The *Pe-kīwēwin* Project:

Research Practicum Report

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By

Elliott Field

Regina, Saskatchewan

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Abstract

The Pe-kīwēwin (Coming Home) project is a 5-year long project designed to uncover policies that led to the Indigenous Child Removal System (ICRS) beginning in the 1950’s. The following is a research practicum report detailing my experience as a research practicum student on the Pe-kīwēwin project. My objectives on the project were to learn about Indigenous research methodology, to learn about and conduct archival research, and to review existing literature relating to child welfare and the ICRS. The report includes a discussion of practicum objectives. Literature pertaining to child welfare, transracial adoption, and Indigenous helping is examined. The methodology used to guide both the Pe-kīwēwin project and my research practicum is discussed. The report includes a discussion of research practicum findings, including how I was guided by theory and practice, consistent with social work values. Ethical considerations and personal challenges are explored. The report reviews completed practicum objectives. I examine implications of Indigenous knowledge and research on social work theory and practice. The report concludes with personal recommendations and an overview of my practicum experience.
Acknowledgments

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Chapter One: Introduction

Practicum Placement

For my Master of Social Work research practicum, I had the opportunity of joining the *Pe-kīwēwin* project as a research practicum student. My research practicum took place at the University of Regina, Faculty of Social Work, between September, 2016 and March, 2017. I was located at the Saskatoon Campus in the student research office. Dr. Raven Sinclair, the Principal Investigator on the *Pe-kīwēwin* project, agreed to become my professional associate for my practicum. Jason Albert, a social work professor with the First Nations University of Canada participated in the role of my academic supervisor, as Dr. Sinclair could not act as both my academic supervisor, as well as my professional associate. The *Pe-kīwēwin* project is a five-year Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded research project aimed at understanding policies that led to the adoption of thousands of Indigenous children beginning in the 1960’s, and continuing on until the 1980’s. Lead by Dr. Sinclair, the study Principal Investigator, the *Pe-kīwēwin* project renames what is commonly called the 60’s scoop as the *Indigenous Child Removal System* (ICRS). Over five years, the *Pe-kīwēwin* project will investigate a variety of issues dealing with the displacement of Indigenous children. Interviews will be conducted with Indigenous adoptees, foster parents, and adoptive parents. Retired professionals previously employed in the area of child welfare will also be interviewed. Archival research and existing child welfare literature will be examined. The extent to which Indigenous children were displaced due to transracial adoption (the adoption of children from one racial background into another racial background) will be analyzed (McRoy, Zurcher, Lauderdale, & Anderson, 1982). Based on project findings, recommendations will be made to help change child welfare policies that impact Indigenous children and Indigenous communities.
As a research practicum student, I had the opportunity to join the Pe-kīwēwin national team comprised of 24 team members from various academic and professional backgrounds, including social workers, lawyers, professors, historians, and archivists. I spent the majority of my research practicum examining existing child welfare literature, including academic research, child welfare reports, and archival material. I was then tasked with annotating the sources I found, with the intention of creating the beginnings of an extensive literature review for the Pe-kīwēwin project that will be included in articles, reports, and a book. I also spent a significant amount of time learning about Indigenous research knowledge in order to gain insight into, and understanding of, the guiding principles behind the Pe-kīwēwin project.

This Practicum Report will begin with personal location, as is consistent with Indigenous research knowledge/methodology (Baskin, 2011). Next, I will review my practicum objectives, as well as examine the literature in relation to child welfare and my practicum experience. I will then discuss the project methodology, which will include a description of my participation in the Pe-kīwēwin project. A discussion of practice methods and theory used to guide my research practicum will follow. I will discuss the implications of Indigenous knowledge in relation to social work theory and practice, as well as provide recommendations for social work theory and practice. The conclusion summarizes my practicum experience.

The following section discusses the idea of “locating self,” as personal reflection on one’s background is important in Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous Research (Baskin, 2011). Personal reflection is important because it helps researchers situate themselves in the context of their research, as well as shows why research is of personal significance and importance (Baskin, 2011). As a non-Indigenous research practicum student, it is important for me to locate myself in relation to the Indigenous research I am participating in.
Locating Self

I was raised on Treaty Six territory, just north of Martensville, Saskatchewan. I was raised by middle-class parents who are educated professionals. My mother, Rita, is of Ukrainian ancestry as her grandparents immigrated to Saskatchewan from Eastern Europe. My father, Andy, is of British ancestry and was born in Southern Australia. My father immigrated to Canada in the 1980’s in order to permanently reside with my mother. Ancestors from the paternal side of my family participated, directly or indirectly, in colonization of Aboriginal peoples in Australia. On the maternal side of the family, my ancestors received land on Treaty Four territory near Yorkton, Saskatchewan, likely at the expense of Indigenous peoples.

As part of my practicum learning process, I adopted an Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) framework in order to investigate my own privilege and biases, and to ensure I did not cause harm to others. AOP is concerned with dismantling power structures that dominate western society and thus perpetuate colonization (Baines, 2007, 2009; Dominelli, 2002). In order for me to not perpetuate ideas and beliefs that promote colonization I need to examine my privilege. As a white, middle class, male social worker, I have certain privileges resulting from the colonization of Indigenous peoples. I am able to access nearly all social spaces, as well as live freely from oppression and racism simply due to my gender, racial ethnicity, and socio-economic status. As a white male, I am privileged in that I never have to think about how my gender, racial ethnicity, or socioeconomic status impacts my life. To be more specific, I have never walked into a job interview or into a public space and wondered if I was going to be treated unfairly because of my gender or the colour of my skin. I realize that for many people, this is not the case. I feel it is important to acknowledge my own privilege because if I do not, there is no way I can work with people who are facing oppression. I believe that people will simply sense that I lack
authenticity. I must admit that it was difficult for me to acknowledge my own privilege because it is unsettling to accept the idea that I have opportunities that others do not, simply due to my gender and ethnicity. If I continue to acknowledge and challenge my own privilege, I can be an effective social worker and an ally with Indigenous peoples.

I am currently employed as a social worker in Mental Health and Addictions Services (MHAS) in the Saskatoon Health Region. Within MHAS I provide individual and group counselling services to men and women who are working towards ending physical and emotional violence within their intimate partner relationships and families. The majority of clients I work with are required to attend programming. More specifically, the majority of people I work with have been convicted of physically assaulting their intimate partners and as part of their sentence are mandated to attend domestic violence treatment programming. My current social work practice requires me to work within the confines of bureaucratic program policies. This research practicum provided an opportunity to expand my knowledge base into a new area of social work that will allow me to practice in a more holistic and inclusive way in the future. My learning objectives specifically focus on improving my skills in research techniques and methodologies, with which I have limited experience. As such, I designed specific objectives in order to maximize the knowledge and understanding that I could take away from my practicum.

**Practicum Objectives**

Throughout my research practicum I had four main learning objectives:

1) My first objective was to gain an understanding of the archival research process, as well as to learn how to conduct archival research. I designed this objective because the Pe-kīwēwin project involves an extensive examination of archival research. Coinciding with this objective were activities such as engaging in informal and formal learning, including
reading online tutorials, and attending archival research training. I also learned how to find, examine, and document archival research material that I retrieved.

2) My second practicum objective was to learn how to locate relevant sources related to child welfare and the ICRS. This objective was created to help assist the Pe-kīwēwin project in gathering existing literature and research pertaining to child welfare and ICRS. Specific activities included using online data bases (e.g. Google Scholar) to search for these documents. I also ordered hard-copy books from various libraries through the University of Regina inter-library loan program. I annotated books and articles that had been reviewed, and subsequently logged the annotations into Zotero, which is an online reference database that assists in managing large bibliographies.

3) My third learning objective was to become familiar with Indigenous research methodology, as well as Indigenous research knowledge in relation to the Pe-kīwēwin project. I created this objective as I felt that it was meaningful for me, as a white, privileged male, to understand how Indigenous knowledge and research methodology can positively influence the social work profession. Learning activities for this objective included exploring Indigenous research methodologies, including how, specifically, an Indigenous research paradigm is applied to research. Another activity was to explore Indigenous knowledge, including Indigenous world views, values, and beliefs that can help to guide social work education in post-secondary institutions, as well as professional practice.

4) My fourth learning objective was to become familiar with the daily activities performed by a research practicum student, as I had no research experience prior to joining the Pe-kīwēwin project. Activities included performing administrative tasks, including
contacting agencies and archival institutions in order to gather information, attending weekly meetings with Dr. Raven Sinclair as my professional associate, and attending monthly meetings with my academic supervisor, Jason Albert PHD (all but dissertation). I also engaged in several informal and formal meetings with fellow practicum student Scott Morrison and research assistant Priscila da Silva to discuss project updates and the formulation of a student article.

Implementation of my four practicum objectives allowed me to gain the most out of my practicum experience, but in order to be effective I first had to review the literature related to the Pe-kīwēwin project and my practicum objectives. Chapter two presents a review of the literature examining child welfare policies in a historical context, transracial adoption in relation to the ICRS, Indigenous knowledge, and Indigenous social work/helping.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

The following literature review will begin with an exploration into the colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This includes an examination into Indigenous involvement with Canadian child welfare systems in a historical context. The Indian Act (1876) and subsequent policies that have contributed to the involvement of Indigenous children in Canadian child welfare systems are reviewed. This is consistent with the Pe-kīwēwin project, as the project aims to understand what led to the current overrepresentation of Indigenous children in Canadian child welfare systems. Transracial adoption in relation to reported health and adjustment outcomes of Indigenous children will be reviewed. This is consistent with the Pe-kīwēwin project as the project aims to understand what policies led to the apprehension and subsequent adoption of Indigenous children into non-Indigenous families. Literature pertaining to Indigenous knowledge, as well as Indigenous social work/helping will be reviewed as consistent with my practicum objectives.

Historical Context

Colonialism is a theoretical framework used by imperialist countries to develop policies and institutions aimed at controlling Indigenous peoples (Taiaiake, 2009). In Canada the Indian Act (1876) is a piece of legislation that stemmed from colonialism and resulted in the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their homes and subsequent placement into Christian-run residential schools (Waterfall, 2006). After decades of forced assimilation via the residential school policy, an amendment was made to the Indian Act in 1951 allowing for provincial jurisdiction of child welfare (Waterfall, 2006). With this amendment, Canadian provinces were allowed to provide services to Indigenous peoples where no federal services existed (Bennet & Sadrehashemi, 2008).
Primarily white, middle-class child protection workers began providing child welfare services, typically without sufficient understanding of colonialism or the impact of the residential school system on Indigenous communities (Waterfall, 2006). They also did not have an understanding of Indigenous knowledge (Waterfall, 2006). The result of newly formed Child Protection Services in Canadian provinces was devastating in that thousands of children were adopted across Canada in what has been referred to as a new form of colonization (Hudson & McKenzie, 1981). The apprehension of thousands of Indigenous children in Canada has been a central aspect of colonization, resulting in cultural genocide (Downey, 1999). Although some Indigenous communities have more control over child welfare processes, Indigenous children are still grossly overrepresented in Canadian child welfare systems (Blackstock, 2003; Trocme, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004).

Unfortunately, it is a reality that more Indigenous children are in foster care today than ever before (Blackstock, 2003). Some literature suggests that as a society we need to tackle the core issues that lie at the heart of the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system. Core issues such as lack of affordable housing, low socio-economic status, and drug and alcohol addiction contribute to the issue at hand (Trocme et al., 2004). Until Indigenous parents are provided with more resources, this overrepresentation will likely continue (Blackstock, 2003). Reports, including the Kimelman Report (1985), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples Report (1996), and Lavallee’s Report (2005) have been commissioned with the goal of providing culturally appropriate support to Indigenous communities in Canada. The Kimelman report (1985) extensively examines the child welfare crisis in Manitoba. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples Report (1996) examines issues related to poverty, child welfare, health, and other issues that Indigenous peoples in Canada experience as a result of
colonization. Lavallee’s Report (2005) examines federal policies related to insufficient access to health care for Indigenous children and youth in Canada. Recommendations made in these reports have often been to no avail (Battiste, 2007). Alfred (2005, 2009) suggests changes are not made because the colonialist majority benefits from exercising control over Indigenous peoples’ participation in Canadian society.

Transracial Adoption

Transracial adoption became popular in the United States, as well as in Canada, following the Second World War. Academic research in the Social Sciences began to examine the outcomes of transracial adoption (Feigelman & Silverman, 1984; Fricke, 1965; Lindholm & Tavliatos, 1980; McRoy & Zurcher, 1983; McRoy et al., 1982; Zastrow, 1973), and many of these studies found little evidence to suggest that transracial adoption resulted in poor outcomes for adoptees in comparison to their peers. For example, in two separate studies McRoy and Zurcher (1983) and McRoy et al. (1982) found that black children adopted by white parents reported the same levels of self-esteem in comparison to black children adopted into black families. Similarly, Feigelman & Silverman (1984) found transracial adoption had generally favourable outcomes based on survey data from 372 adoptive parents.

It is important to note that although these studies suggest transracial adoption has favourable outcomes, there are potential problems related to how the studies were conducted and how the data was analyzed. For example, studies by McRoy and Zurcher (1983), McRoy et al. (1982), and Feigelman and Silverman (1984) all chose to recruit educators or adoptive parents as their research sample, rather than to interview adoptees. Thus data analyzed in the above studies exclusively contains perspectives of caregivers and educators, rather than the perspectives of the
adoptees themselves. Research examining transracial adoption of Indigenous children is scarce (Nuttgens, 2013).

Research on the transracial adoption of Indigenous children in Canada is underdeveloped considering the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in adoptive homes (Fournier & Crey, 1997). It is important to examine transracial adoption of Indigenous children separately from other forms of transracial adoption due to the unique socio-cultural experiences of Indigenous peoples stemming from colonialism (Nuttgens, 2013). The literature that does exist usually reports negative outcomes in terms of Indigenous children and adolescents’ ability to adapt in their adopted home (Bagley, 1991, 1993; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Huntinghawk, 2012; Nuttgens, 2013; Sinclair, 2007a). There are multiple factors that create difficulty in transracial adoption, including identity issues, racism, socio-economic factors, trauma, and mental health (Fournier & Crey, 1997; Nuttgens, 2013; Sinclair, 2007a). Existing literature suggests a need for non-Indigenous adoptive parents to have a better understanding of the identity concerns of Indigenous adoptees (Nuttgens, 2013). This is meaningful as the few existing studies that examine the experiences of transracially adopted Indigenous children state that cultural identity issues may be the root cause of depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicidality (Bagley, 1991; Nuttgens, 2012). Two recent studies of Indigenous children who were transracially adopted are worth exploring because little research exists in this area.

Huntinghawk (2012 and Nuttgens (2013) examined the outcomes of Indigenous children adopted into non-Indigenous homes. Huntinghawk (2012) conducted a qualitative study exploring the experiences of five non-aboriginal couples who adopted Indigenous children in Manitoba during the 1960’s. She found that all but one of her participants felt their adoptive child experienced racism on a fairly consistent basis. Furthermore, all but one of the adoptive
couples felt they would have benefited from post adoption services (Huntinghawk, 2012). Couples were frustrated by what they perceived to be a lack of support from adoptive agencies shortly after their adoption was finalized (Huntinghawk, 2012). Adoptive couples indicated that almost all of the adoptions broke down during the child’s teenage years, but interestingly, none of the adoptive parents permanently lost contact with their adopted child. Parents expressed a desire to incorporate Indigenous knowledge and teachings into their adoptive child’s life but were unsure of how to go about doing so (Huntinghawk, 2012).

Nuttgens’ (2013) study differs in that he interviewed adult adoptees who were transracially adopted in Canada during the 1960’s. Nuttgens (2013) identifies common experiences between the stories of four Indigenous adults. These adults were adopted as children into non-Indigenous families. Some of the most unsettling themes are related to racism and disconnection/identity confusion (Nuttgens, 2013). Participants mentioned that they struggled to fit into “white society” and never really felt accepted (Nuttgens, 2013). Nuttgen’s findings suggest, similar to that of other studies, that there is a need for Indigenous adoptees to reconnect with their Indigenous culture and community (Huntinghawk, 2012; Nuttgens, 2013; Sinclair, 2007a, 2007b) and this suggestion has lent additional credence given that Relationality and Interconnectedness are central Indigenous knowledge concepts (Wilson, 2008).

**Indigenous Knowledge**

Interconnectedness and Relationality are guiding values in Indigenous knowledge (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Human beings are connected not only to each other, but also to all life forms that exist on mother earth and in the cosmos (Wilson, 2001, 2008). Values of Interconnectedness and Relationality are paramount when considering a holistic approach to helping (Baskin, 2011). These values promote the idea that people must be viewed within the
context of their relationships and their larger community (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008). In other words, a holistic approach to helping examines people within a larger context, and refrains from viewing client concerns solely from an individual perspective (Baskin, 2011). This differs from western views of helping, which often provides treatment to individuals without necessarily examining their concerns within the larger context of the community (Baskin, 2011).

Interconnectedness and Relationality are part of an Indigenous holistic approach.

Indigenous holistic approaches suggest that there are four different aspects of the self (Baskin, 2011): spiritual, physical, emotional, and psychological (Hart, 2002; Verniest, 2006). All four aspects of the self are considered to be of equal importance (Verniest, 2006). Indigenous knowledge suggests that when one part of the self is unhealthy or misaligned the entire person is impacted (Hart, 2002; Verniest, 2006). Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous helping methods can have positive implications for the social work profession.

**Indigenous Social Work/Helping**

An important aspect of my research practicum learning was examining Indigenous knowledge in relation to social work. Baskin (2011) suggests that an Indigenous world view guides Indigenous helping practices, and so we must understand Indigenous ethics of reciprocity, relationality, and interconnectedness (Baskin, 2011).

One important aspect of Indigenous helping has to do with nurturing the relationship between the person being helped and the helper (Hart, 2002). This relationship, rather than the particular method of helping, is what is considered most important (Hart, 2002). The ability for an individual helper to connect with people by being genuine, empathetic, open, and understanding is far more important than the actual method used (Baskin, 2011; Hart, 2002). Similarly, the amount of professional training or education a helper has, does not necessarily
predict success in counselling or other social work practices (Hart, 2002). In Indigenous helping, wisdom gained from lived experience is often seen as being more important than professional credentials or academic knowledge (Baskin, 2011).

According to Indigenous helping, some of the best counsellors are people who have lived through addiction themselves (Baskin, 2011). Baskin (2011) suggests that perhaps the best policy makers are those who have experienced the issue in question. In Indigenous communities, Elders are considered to have wisdom and knowledge as they have the most life experience (Baskin, 2011).

Another important concept in Indigenous helping or in Indigenous social work has to do with interrelatedness (Baskin, 2011). In Indigenous communities, there is the widely held ethic that family, community, spirituality, and values are all connected (Wilson, 2001, 2008). The individual self is almost impossible to separate from the larger community and spirituality (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2008). A helper is to be accountable to not only the individual being supported, but also to the larger community. Furthermore, the issues or difficulties of one individual are examined in the larger context of community. Put another way, individual problems are not necessarily viewed separately from the larger community, reinforcing the importance of interrelatedness (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2008). This contrasts with current western social work practices that often pathologize and place blame on the individual (Baskin, 2011; Baines, 2007). Rather than looking at the individual’s strengths, he or she is examined based on his/her deficits (Baskin, 2011; Baines, 2007).

When social workers are working in Indigenous communities, their role as a helper, according to Indigenous principles, is to guide participants in creating respectful processes with one another (Baskin, 2011; Baines, 2007). The use of language is important here, in that
‘guiding’ can be viewed as being different from ‘directing’ or ‘leading.’ Guiding refers to more of a supportive role where those in need of help are given support, allowing them to make their own decisions.

This literature review section has discussed the social and political climate that existed in Canada during the late 1800’s and into the late 1900’s. The policies that were developed led to attempted assimilation first through the Residential School System and then through transracial adoption, which have both had catastrophic consequences for Indigenous peoples (Bagley, 1991, 1993; Fournier & Crey, 1997; Waterfall, 2006). These attempts at assimilation by the Canadian federal and provincial governments contributed to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system in Canada (Blackstock, 2003, 2004). Transracial adoption was reviewed in relation to Indigenous children being adopted into primarily white homes. The limited research that exists suggests that transracial adoption has had negative implications for Indigenous peoples. Key principles related to Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous helping methods were examined. These principles guide Indigenous helping practices and inform social work practice that is supportive, inclusive and holistic.

Becoming familiar with the literature in these areas was essential for my work as a practicum student and as a social worker because it provided me with a deeper understanding of the historical context in North America at the time that Europeans were beginning to colonize and assimilate Indigenous peoples. I have learned about the events that occurred that allowed many Indigenous children to first become wards of the state and then adopted into non-Indigenous homes and the inter-generational trauma that has occurred as a result. I am able to be more empathetic toward the populations that I serve in my practice and also more critical of the existing research and aware of its limitations. Becoming familiar with Indigenous knowledge and
the role of helping in Indigenous social work will allow me to work more effectively with Indigenous clients.

The literature helped me to begin learning about Indigenous knowledge and prepared me for working in an Indigenous research context. Chapter three will discuss Indigenous research methodologies, as well as review the methodology of the *Pe-kīwēwin project*. 
Chapter Three: Methodologies

Indigenous research methodology is not something that should merely be incorporated into current social work academia … within social work academia and the social work profession in general, space needs to be created for Indigenous scholars to implement their own research paradigms (Dumbrill & Green, 2008).

Indigenous Research

Throughout my academic and professional journey as a social worker, I do not recall specifically learning about Indigenous research methods or an Indigenous research paradigm. Thus, when I began my practicum with the Pe-kīwēwin project I recall a general sense of excitement. I knew I would need to learn about Indigenous research to further my practicum objectives. In preparation, I read Shawn Wilson’s (2008) book “Research is Ceremony” which provided a comprehensive guide to understanding Indigenous research methods and breaks down the core elements of Ontology, Epistemology, Axiology, and Methodology in relation to Indigenous research.

Ontology essentially refers to one’s understanding of the nature of existence, or the nature of reality (Wilson, 2008). Ontology, in relation to Indigenous research knowledge, suggests that reality may be different for an individual based on the relationship he/she has with the truth (Wilson, 2001, 2008). Essentially, understanding the relationship one has with his/her truth is more important than trying to uncover a single truth, which significantly differs from western research knowledge (Wilson, 2008). In the course of this project, I have come to realize that my Ontological approach to social work research is not an Indigenous one. I have learned in a western dominated society that there is one way of understanding the universe and that universal/single truths exist. I am beginning to challenge my understanding of Ontology, as my
practicum experience has widened my understanding of Indigenous research knowledge. I have increased my own awareness, allowing me to realize that single truths are often overly simplistic and minimize personal experience.

Epistemology, in Indigenous research refers to how people come to know, or think about, the world (Wilson, 2008). Unlike in western research knowledge where some theories suggest that the way people come to think, or to know, involves a select few processes, Indigenous research knowledge suggests that people come to know and think through many different means (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2008). In the course of my practicum, I learned from many perspectives including sharing personal experiences, observing others and through reading. I also learned from reflecting on my own life and by bonding with others through shared experience and common interests.

Methodology refers to the theory of how knowledge itself is gained, or how people come to understand information (Wilson, 2008). For example, according to Indigenous research, knowledge is gained through stories, dreams, talking circles, observations and cellular memory (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2008). In this view, no one way of gaining knowledge is superior to another. It could be argued that this differs from western knowledge where learning through reading or in an official academic setting is often seen as superior. During my practicum I learned to challenge my own ways of thinking which suggest that the western view that I am so accustomed to places too much emphasis on academic learning.

Axiology refers to the ethics or morals that guide people’s search for knowledge (Wilson, 2008). In Indigenous research it is of the utmost importance for practice to be guided by ethics and morals that promote relational accountability, as well as transparency (Wilson, 2008). In the course of my research practicum, I learned that social work values and ethics and Indigenous
knowledge have much in common. Social work ethics promote social justice and human rights (Canadian Association of Social Workers, 2005). Similarly, Indigenous knowledge adheres to ethical standards that promote equality and respect for all peoples (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2008).

In terms of the project Methodology, the *Pe-kīwēwin* project involves two sub-projects – archival research and qualitative research. The archival sub-project involves the examination of archival documents and Indigenous child welfare literature from secondary sources. The first subproject is currently well underway with several team members collecting and examining material from archives in Saskatoon, Regina, Winnipeg, Ottawa, British Columbia, and Toronto. Researchers are also collecting and examining existing child welfare literature accessed through online databases and libraries.

The goal of the first sub-project is to understand what policies led to the Indigenous Child Removal System (ICRS). This process involves creating a wide scoping review in order to document and understand what is currently known about Indigenous child welfare in Canada. This will hopefully lead to an understanding of policies and practices that led to the ICRS.

The second sub-project follows a qualitative framework and consists of interviewing Indigenous adoptees, foster parents, adoptive parents, and retired child welfare professionals in order to gain insights into the experiences of people impacted by and involved in the ICRS. Respondent driven sampling (RDS) will be used to recruit study participants. Data gained from interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis with the use of NVivo qualitative data analysis software. Consistent with Indigenous research methodology, study participants will be involved in the research process, and lessons learned from the *Pe-kīwēwin* project will be shared
with research participants and Indigenous communities (Wilson, 2008). During my research practicum I exclusively participated in conducting research in relation to the first sub-project.

**Research Activities**

As a research practicum student I participated in the first sub-project of the *Pe-kīwēwin* project. I reviewed existing literature related to child welfare and the ICRS. I spent time searching for literature related to the project in order to gain knowledge as to the existing research, avoid duplication of research efforts among *Pe-kīwēwin* team members, and identify gaps in the knowledge base. I reviewed books, academic articles, newspaper articles, and government/agency reports over several months. Literature that was deemed relevant to the project was summarized, including key points and important topics covered in the literature. This process is known as annotating literature. I then logged annotated sources into Zotero, an online referencing application that allows for teams to collaborate on literature activities. This resulted in *Pe-kīwēwin* project members having access to a well-organized, shared library where relevant literature is available to be examined and utilized to assist in a future scoping review and other knowledge mobilization outcomes.

In total, I annotated approximately 60 sources during my practicum. Of specific interest and significance are the Kimelman report (1985) and the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (1996) report. The Kimelman report (1985) extensively examines the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system in Manitoba. The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal peoples* Report (1996) explores issues related to poverty, child welfare, and health; that Indigenous peoples in Canada experience as a result of colonization. These sources, along with other sources I annotated, will be reviewed in the *Achievement of Objectives/Discussion* section of this paper.
An important aspect of the *Pe-kīwēwin* project involved locating archival documents related to child welfare from the 1960’s to the 1980’s. By conducting archival research, the *Pe-kīwēwin* team will have a better understanding of the policies that led to the ICRS. When I began my practicum, I immediately began familiarizing myself with the archival research process. This process involved gaining an understanding of how to locate archival material. I learned to pay attention to specific details when reviewing archival material, as the names of departments related to Indigenous affairs and child welfare changed throughout the years.

In order to learn more about archival research, I received introductory training at the Saskatchewan Archives in Saskatoon and at the National Archives in Ottawa. Training involved gaining an understanding of the overall organizational structure of provincial and federal archives, including understanding how documents are catalogued and stored. I also had to understand how to locate and identify relevant archival documents related to the Indigenous Child Removal System. Another aspect of training was focused on the procedures for ordering, as well as properly referencing archival documents using online databases. After receiving training, the main activity that I engaged in was sorting through online finding aids. Finding aids are documents that contain information about a collection of archival material, including records and papers. Finding aids are necessary as it would be nearly impossible to locate specific archival documents without them. I used online finding aids from the Saskatchewan provincial archives and the Canadian national archives to ascertain sources that may be of value to the project. Sources of value were then ordered from the archives by my fellow student archival researchers.

Learning about Indigenous research methodology is important in order to understand guiding principles behind the *Pe-kīwēwin project*. Indigenous methodology suggests that there
are many ways to acquire knowledge including through stories, dreams and talking circles (Wilson, 2008). The Pe-kīwēwin project utilizes an Indigenous research framework to guide research practices. The project also uses a qualitative research approach to interview Indigenous adoptees, foster parents, and adoptive parents to gather information about the ICRS.

In addition to learning about methodology, it is important to examine ethical considerations in relation to the Pe-kīwēwin project.

**Ethical Considerations**

The Pe-kīwēwin project received ethics approval on November 17, 2017 from the University of Regina Research Ethics Board during my practicum. Since I had access to confidential information only available to Pe-kīwēwin team members, I operated within the parameters of the Pe-kīwēwin non-disclosure agreement ensuring that I did not share any confidential information. At the completion of my practicum, I confirmed that my personal access to Pe-kīwēwin project data had been revoked. I also adhered to the Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW] (2005) Code of Ethics and Professional Practice Guidelines in that, as a registered social worker, I have a duty to practice cultural sensitivity and to do no harm (pp. 3-4). Furthermore, I tried to follow my own personal morals and ethics to ensure that my actions and behaviours did not result in the perpetuation of colonialism by misunderstanding or ignoring Indigenous values and beliefs.

In the next section I will discuss the data processing and analysis procedures I became familiar with throughout the course of my practicum.

**Data Processing and Analysis Procedures**

I was required to become familiar with certain computer programs during my research practicum in order to remain organized as well as to store and analyze data. The project
management program *Asana* was used, as a professional networking tool, to remain in contact with *Pe-kīwēwin* team members, and to keep track of my tasks. I found this program to be extremely useful as I was able to share my work in a safe and secure way with team members across Canada. Furthermore, I was able to track my progress and record completed tasks. This promoted transparency and accountability by allowing *Pe-kīwēwin* team members to follow completion of tasks within the whole group.

Google Drive was used to store documents and material related to open and closed archival findings and the project in general. Open archival findings are archival documents that are non-restricted and available to the general public; closed archival findings are documents that are restricted, and that members of the *Pe-kīwēwin* project have gained access to through an Access to Information application process. Closed archival findings often contain sensitive material and hence will remain stored on secure drives.

I did not have the opportunity to conduct my own qualitative interviews as I was working on the first sub-project, and thus did not have data to analyze using qualitative data analysis software. I did spend a part of my practicum familiarizing myself with NVivo in order to gain insight as to how interviews are coded. I also used NVivo to learn how specific themes are identified in interviews, which is a feature that makes the software efficient for producing useable findings. The wide variety of activities performed during my practicum allowed me to gain insight and understanding into research in social work and the social sciences.

A variety of tasks that I performed during my research practicum allowed for a greater understanding of methods used to acquire knowledge. Readings on Indigenous knowledge by Baskin (2011) and Wilson (2001, 2008) were central to my understanding that the *Pe-kīwēwin* project is guided by ideas such as relational accountability, reciprocity, and transparency. These
authors helped me learn more about Indigenous ways of knowing and prompted me to reflect on my own practice as a social worker. Reports such as the Kimelman report (1985) and the Royal Commission on Indigenous Peoples report (1996) provided me with an opportunity to examine concerns pertaining to child welfare practices and Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Four will examine the theoretical approach I took in working on the *Pe-kīwēwin research project* as well as the integration of theory to practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion about the significance of being an ally.
Chapter Four: Integration of Theory and Practice

Anti-Oppressive Practice

Anti-Oppressive Practice (AOP) was a useful lens for investigating my own biases and to incorporate culturally sensitive practices into my research practicum. AOP is rooted in social justice, aiming to dismantle power structures that exist in westernized systems of dominance (Baines, 2007, 2009; Dominelli, 2002). Social work literature discussing AOP often focuses on power imbalances that exist between the Eurocentric colonizers and colonized peoples (Baines, 2007; Campbell, 2003; Dominelli, 2002). Hence I found it useful to apply an AOP framework in order to guide me through my practicum.

I incorporated AOP into my practice by acknowledging my own biases and by working to dismantle my own power, similar to what Baines (2007) suggests. For example, I am well aware that as a privileged male I am often viewed as an authority figure by clients I serve at my place of work. In contrast, while working on the Pe-kīwēwin project I was in a position where I had the opportunity to practice humility, as I was led by a team mainly consisting of powerful women of Indigenous ancestry. I embraced the opportunity and ensured that Pe-kīwēwin team members knew that my role was to listen and to learn, rather than to lead. When fellow social workers inquired about my research practicum experience I made it known that the project was run by Indigenous leaders and that I was in the position of a research practicum student. I deliberately used this language to ensure that people realized I was in a position that required me to learn. An important aspect of AOP is that it does not view the individual separate from the larger society, which is consistent with Indigenous helping methods (Baskin, 2011; Baines, 2007).

In my work as a counsellor, client concerns are primarily viewed through an individual lens. For example, if a client is struggling with anger or with an addiction, I am not encouraged
to take into consideration external factors such as poverty, oppression, racism, and most importantly, a colonial context. I am taught that of most importance is personal accountability and responsibility. In my experience there is a notion in western therapy that anything is possible as long as an individual is motivated to work hard. In my place of employment I try to acknowledge clients’ entire story, including external factors and the impacts of colonialism, when providing services. In order to practice using an AOP framework it is imperative that I understand how to form an alliance with Indigenous peoples.

Becoming an Ally

After beginning my practicum, I became aware that due to my privilege and historical role as a colonizer, I would need to learn how to form an alliance with Indigenous peoples. An Australian study conducted by Bennet, Zubrzycki, and Bacon (2011) provided a unique perspective on how non-Indigenous social workers can be allies. The study in question implemented a purposive sampling method to recruit social workers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry (Bennet et al., 2011). The study’s results suggest that Indigenous and non-Indigenous social workers must reflect on how their personal and cultural identities impact their practice with Indigenous peoples (Bennet et al., 2011). The results of the study emphasize that non-Indigenous social workers must understand the history of colonization, including gaining insight as to how colonization has impacted their professional practice (Bennet et al., 2011).

I initially wanted to attend graduate school to gain insight into the specific impact colonization has had, and continues to have, on Indigenous peoples in Canada. I felt I had a beginning knowledge in terms of colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada after my undergraduate social work degree. However, I have become increasingly aware that I am actually fairly uninformed when it comes to understanding the complexities of colonization, as
well as the perhaps more covert and subtle policies that are involved in continued colonization (Corntassel, 2005). Upon reflection, I realize that as a non-Indigenous social worker I have been shaped by a westernized lens that essentially views the self as being most important. More specifically, I realize that I have been raised with this individualistic, capitalistic ideology that I have the power to change anything and that personal accountability trumps all. To become an effective ally, I need to learn more about the governmental policies that have perpetuated oppression. Bennet et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of this when they state:

For non-Aboriginal social workers, the critical interrogation and reflection on the role and influence of the self in practice also involves going on a journey, encompassing the ability to acknowledge the privilege that comes with the cultural identity of Whiteness and recognizing that Aboriginal people will invariably identify you as being “one of the colonisers” (p. 25).

The above quote emphasizes the importance of acknowledging my own privilege and in accepting that Indigenous peoples I provide services to may view me as a colonizer. It is important to acknowledge that it is absolutely acceptable for Indigenous peoples to be apprehensive or even hostile towards me as a non-Indigenous outsider. I believe that my role is to be authentic and to openly acknowledge that I have benefited and continue to benefit from colonization.

I believe a personal shift in mindset can come from taking responsibility for my own cultural and personal identities. For me to become a more affective ally, I have to become responsible for personal biases, beliefs, and values that may be directly conflicting with Indigenous ways of knowing. I can make a commitment to practice as a social worker in a way that is not perpetuating colonization or oppression.
Another important aspect in becoming an ally has to do with being open and transparent about why one is choosing to work with Indigenous peoples (Bennet et al., 2011). Bennet et al.’s (2011) study suggests that Indigenous peoples are very well versed in reading social workers, and if the social worker is not genuine or honest about his/her intentions, the social worker will not be able to build a relationship. Non-Indigenous social workers need to have a strong understanding of what motivates them to do the work they do and to be able to explain their motives to the Indigenous peoples they serve (Bennet et al., 2011).

Upon personal reflection of my five years of social work practice, I realize that these ideas were in front of me the whole time. Many Indigenous men have asked me why I decided to become a social worker. I did not think that those questions were significant at the time. Instead, I believed it was more important to complete paperwork and to explain specific details related to counselling, rather than to discuss my intent or my own purpose. To have recognized this would have made me a much more affective ally and I now realize that this was a significant oversight.

There is also a great amount of emphasis placed on the importance of Non-Indigenous social workers building relationships with Indigenous peoples and the communities they serve (Bennet et al., 2011). In Indigenous communities there is little separation of professional and personal life, so self-disclosure, including revealing information pertaining to your own family of origin and life in general, is important (Bennet et al., 2011). Again, this is information that really resonates with me. I absolutely believe that it is essential as a social worker to be willing to disclose to people I serve, in order to build healthy, reciprocal relationships and to form the allegiances that are important for growth. However, I often find myself feeling frustrated as I feel that my workplace overtly discourages self-disclosure. Furthermore, western counselling
methodologies, by which I am influenced, dictate that I cover certain criteria, leaving little time to truly get to know the clients I serve.

Perhaps most importantly, I have learned that in order to become an ally I must listen and be open to new ways of knowing (Bennet et al., 2011). During my practicum I focused on listening and remaining open in order to become a more productive ally.

In the following section I will discuss how I incorporated Indigenous knowledge into theory and practice.

**Incorporating Theory and Practice**

Indigenous knowledge helped to guide my practicum activities. I reflected on the meaning behind Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research, and I learned that the guiding principles that stem from Indigenous research knowledge focus on transparency, openness, and accountability (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2001, 2008).

Transparency and openness are concepts that I have often struggled with in my professional practice as a social worker. Personally, I learned that transparency and openness are important in social work theory; however, what I learned about these values in professional practice conflicted with social work theory. For example, in working with primarily mandated clients as a counsellor, I was taught to avoid being open and transparent as it could be used against me. I am learning that being transparent and open does not necessarily dictate that I reveal personal information about myself. Rather, being transparent and open may involve me connecting authentically with clients without necessarily sharing specific, personal details about myself. For example, I can connect with clients by discussing common values, hobbies, or interests. On the *Pe-kîwêwin* project, transparency and openness involved me being open and
honest about why I decided to partake in an Indigenous research project. This also included me being open about my personal intent as a research practicum student on the project. What I learned about accountability is that it is important to not only be accountable to myself, my co-workers, and my employer, but also to the larger community. This included recognition of my own biases, beliefs, and values that may conflict with Indigenous knowledge and in some cases perpetuate oppression. Throughout my practicum I did my best to inform Pe-kīwēwin team members and the larger community as to my own purpose. More specifically, I was open about the fact that I chose to partake in the Pe-kīwēwin project as a privileged, white male in order to gain more insight into the effects colonialism has had, and continues to have, in Indigenous communities.

Taking time to understand Indigenous research knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing helped guide my practice. Indigenous research knowledge influenced how I practiced as a research practicum student and as a professional. As a student I embraced the idea, consistent with Indigenous research knowledge, that there are multiple ways to gain knowledge. Furthermore, I resonated with the idea that knowledge is not to be owned by a single individual, but instead it is to be shared with the community, with the intent of improving people’s lives (Wilson, 2008). Therefore, I embraced the idea that I was not a single individual taking part in a research practicum on the Pe-kīwēwin project, but instead that I was a part of a community of people tasked with finding what led to the Indigenous Child Removal System. Despite the sense of community, as a non-Indigenous student working in an Indigenous context, I was confronted with the challenge of being an outsider.
Challenges: Being an Outsider

Due to significant privilege, there have only been few occasions throughout my life that I have felt like an outsider. One of these occasions came from my time spent on the *Pe-kīwēwin* project as a research practicum student. I will never forget the first time that I met multiple *Pe-kīwēwin* team members, as well as stakeholders on the *Pe-kīwēwin* project. I realized very quickly that most people involved with the project are of Indigenous ancestry. Most people had directly experienced horrific repercussions of colonialism, including the ICRS, throughout their lives. I was readily aware that I did not share a common narrative with many *Pe-kīwēwin* members in relation to colonization. On the contrary, a part of my narrative, historically and presently, is that of the colonizer.

In order to manage this challenge, I focused on what it means to be an ally consistent with the research of Bennet et al. (2011). In order to form alliances with *Pe-kīwēwin* team members, I practiced coming from a place of not knowing, and on exercising humility (Bennet et al., 2011). In all honesty, this was a significant challenge for me as I often speak far more than I listen. However, through personal reflection and embracing Indigenous ways of knowing I learned that my role was to listen and learn, rather than to speak and direct others.

In summary, the theories that guided my research practicum – Anti Oppressive Practice and Bennet et al.’s guidance on Becoming an Ally were valuable because they allowed me to identify my own privilege, as well as provided me with concrete strategies to be an effective social worker. Although I had to contend with being an outsider, being part of an Indigenous research team was valuable because I was able to expand my social work knowledge, as well as learn how I can ally with Indigenous peoples in a respectful and effective way.
In Chapter Five I review my practicum objectives and discuss how each objective was achieved, drawing upon my experience in placement as well as the relevant literature. Chapter Five will also include a discussion of the implications Indigenous knowledge has for social work theory and practice.
Chapter Five: Achievement of Objectives/Discussion

I had four main objectives throughout the course of my research practicum. My first objective was to gain an understanding of archival research. This included learning about the archival research process, including how to access, analyze, and store archival data. My second objective was to examine and summarize research, both academic and non-academic, related to child welfare and the Indigenous Child Removal System. For my third objective I learned about Indigenous research methodology and Indigenous ways of knowing. This involved exploring Indigenous research methodologies, including how an Indigenous research paradigm is applied to research. This objective further included reflecting on the implications of Indigenous knowledge for social work theory and practice. My fourth and final objective was to gain an understanding of the daily activities of a research practicum student. As a novice researcher I had little insight into what specific processes are completed by a research practicum student. This objective included attending project meetings, completing various administrative tasks, and understanding processes involved in a research project. Through archival research I was able to understand how archival research can help to understand colonial practices.

Archival Research

My first practicum objective was to understand how archival research can be beneficial in understanding colonial practices that led to the ICRS. One way I achieved this objective was by gaining insight into the exploitation of Indigenous peoples as labourers on sugar beet farms in Southern Alberta, beginning in the 1950’s.

Immigration of European peoples to Southern Alberta slowed after the Second World War, resulting in a labour shortage (Laliberte, 1994). The Federal-Provincial Agricultural Manpower Committee, along with The Department of Indian Affairs, ran campaigns designed to
Recruit Indigenous peoples for sugar beet farming in Southern Alberta beginning in the 1950’s (Laliberte, 1994; Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999). Indigenous peoples did not necessarily want to leave their northern communities to farm the sugar beet fields (Laliberte, 1994; Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999), so the provincial and federal governments used manipulative and coercive tactics to force recruitment (Laliberte, 1994). One of these tactics was to threaten to cut off welfare payments to Treaty Indians living on reserves if they did not agree to farm the sugar beet fields (Laliberte, 1994). I had the privilege of speaking with Sylvia McAdams, a member of the Pe-kíwēwin research team, who recalled childhood memories of family members receiving letters threatening to cut off social assistance if they did not migrate to the beet fields (Personal Communication, Dec 15, 2016). This coercive tactic was seen as a way of maintaining the Indigenous supply of labour (Laliberte, 1994).

Indigenous peoples who agreed to engage in sugar beet farming were severely exploited (Laliberte, 1994; Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999), often through loopholes in labour laws (Laliberte, 1994). For example, Indigenous workers employed in the sugar beet industry were classified as contract workers and as a result were not granted employment insurance (Laliberte, 1994). Workers did not receive any payment until their entire contract was fulfilled; therefore, if an Indigenous worker became ill or was laid off due to lack of work, they received no payment for any of the work that they had already done (Laliberte, 1994). Alberta provincial law also failed to provide compensation or protection to Indigenous workers in the event of a work-related injury (Laliberte, 1994).

Perhaps most unsettling was the discovery that agricultural work was exempt from child labour laws, resulting in children working alongside their parents (Laliberte, 1994). At the time, the view held by government authorities and the Sugar Beet Farming Association of Southern
Alberta was that it was the responsibility of parents to ensure their children did not work in the fields (Ferguson & Lipton, 1969). This line of thinking is problematic as it places the blame on Indigenous parents, even though Indigenous workers were not provided child care and as a result had little choice but to have their children in the sugar beet fields with them (Ferguson & Lipton, 1969). This perspective fails to acknowledge that the likelihood of a family successfully planting and harvesting their sugar beet fields, and thus fulfilling their contract, were unrealistic without the help of children (Ferguson & Lipton, 1969; Laliberte, 1994, 2006; Laliberte & Satzewich, 1999). Ferguson and Lipton (1969) state the following in relation to exploitation of Indigenous children:

Child labour is another feature of sugar beet work. Most of the Indian families have small children who work side-by-side with their parents in the beet fields. Most of the Indians don’t like the idea of their children working in the beet fields, especially the younger ones of six, or seven, but feel they have no choice if the family is going to feed and clothe itself. The beet growers cynically exploit the situation as a device to obtain cheap labour. (as cited in Laliberte, 1994, p. 133)

Indigenous peoples were operating within a system set up to fail. The structure of sugar beet farming is in many ways similar to the child welfare system around the same time period. Indigenous parents were blamed for allowing their children to work in the sugar beet fields, similar to how they were blamed for providing insufficient care to their children, resulting in forced apprehension (Bagley, 1991; Sinclair, 2007a).

Sylvia McAdams, a Pe-kîwêwin team member, shared with me her experience working in sugar beet fields as a child (Personal Communication, Dec 15, 2016). McAdams worked in the sugar beet fields alongside her family in order to fulfil sugar beet contracts, beginning in the
1970’s (Personal Communication, Dec 15, 2016). McAdams acknowledged that her family did not receive any income until sugar beet contracts were fulfilled (Personal Communication, Dec 15, 2016). As a result, McAdams recalled going hungry for several days because her family could not afford to purchase groceries (Personal communication, Dec 17, 2016).

Although I cannot make a direct link between sugar beet farming in Southern Alberta and the apprehension of Indigenous children, a connection seems plausible with respect to how Indigenous families and children have been socially constructed. Indigenous parents working in sugar beet fields were often viewed as being incompetent and neglectful by the colonialist European community (Laliberte, 1994; Ferguson & Lipton, 1996), not unlike how Indigenous parenting practices were viewed as being neglectful and inadequate by child protection workers (Downey, 1999; Waterfall, 2006).

My second practicum objective was to gain a better understanding of child welfare literature in relation to the ICRS.

**Indigenous Child Welfare Literature**

I examined literature pertaining to child welfare and the ICRS in accordance with my second practicum objective. Several reports examining the systemic oppression faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada have been commissioned throughout the last few decades. Two notable reports include the Kimelman report (1985) and The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996). Both the Kimelman report (1985) and the RCAP (1996) make several recommendations designed to deal with core issues of discrimination, poverty, racism, and colonization that Indigenous peoples face in Canada. The following excerpt is from the RCAP (1996):
Aboriginal nations will be able to exercise authority in core areas of jurisdiction while new or renewed treaties are being negotiated. During the transition, community services will be delivered variously by new institutions mandates under Aboriginal authority; by agencies mandates by federal, provincial and territorial governments but directed by Aboriginal people; and by mainstream institutions that have modified their approaches to provide culturally appropriate services. While structural change is being negotiated, there is an urgent need to implement approaches that will: 1: assign a priority to social policy development; 2. Adopt an integrated approach across policy areas and between different governments and government departments; and 3. Create space for Aboriginal initiative. (p. 624)

The above quotation highlights the importance of acknowledging and accepting Indigenous sovereignty. Furthermore, the RCAP (1996) appears to emphasize a need to dismantle euro-centric structures, allowing for the implementation of culturally relevant services. The RCAP (1996) also makes reference to extensive harm that has been done to Indigenous peoples through systematic oppression and eradication of Indigenous knowledge, language, and culture (Vol. 1, pp. 331-409). The Kimelman report (1985) makes several recommendations in regards to child welfare practices in Manitoba specifically, and in Canada in general. Justice Kimelman found that child protection workers lacked professional training and understanding of Indigenous knowledge, resulting in the apprehension of thousands of Indigenous children (Kimelman, 1985). Kimelman’s (1985) findings led to recommendations similar to the RCAP (1996) in that acknowledgment was made that Indigenous peoples needed to have control over their own
communities and their own child welfare services. Unfortunately, little real change has come about as a result of these reports (Battiste, 2007).

Indigenous peoples throughout the world are still facing systemic oppression resulting from the western educational and child welfare systems (Battiste, 2007; Downey, 1999; Waterfall, 2006). It may be the case that report recommendations are not taken seriously and decolonization is not embraced by the Canadian state because of economic reasons and feelings of racial superiority (Alfred, 2002, 2009). Those who are in power (i.e. the colonialist majority) benefit by removing Indigenous people from their land and by exercising control over how Indigenous peoples participate in the economy (Alfred, 2009). The only way to create real change is for both individuals and the larger Canadian state to acknowledge their own racist beliefs and assumptions about Indigenous peoples (Alfred, 2009).

Alfred (2009) also indicates that decolonization cannot occur without Indigenous peoples being able to exercise their rights by returning to their land, and rebuilding/reconnecting with their culture and communities.

Through reviewing child welfare literature, including academic literature and policy, I was able to further my own knowledge of the history that created the current political and cultural climate. This new knowledge formed the basis of my third objective, which was to understand the implications that Indigenous knowledge has for social work theory and practice.

**Implications for Social Work Theory and Practice**

During my practicum I learned that Indigenous knowledge has significant implications for social work theory and practice. Dumbrill and Green (2008) suggest that most social work programs merely incorporate Indigenous knowledge into existing euro-centric structures. Put another way, most social work faculties have implemented some sort of anti-oppressive
framework or culturally competent curriculum into an existing euro-centric system (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). Implementation of anti-oppressive and culturally sensitive mandates is often not overseen by Indigenous peoples, risking cultural subjugation (Dumbrill & Green, 2008).

Another issue is that Indigenous academics are not getting their own educational space outside of the umbrella of existing neocolonialist/western education (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). The following excerpt from Dumbrill and Green’s (2008) work highlights a common problem in many social work programs:

With European thought established as the norm in today’s society, modern academics with no intention of colonizing Aboriginal peoples still do so. Bringing Indigenous knowledge into a Eurocentric academy forces such knowledge to fit into an overarching European framework. The European thinker may not recognize this as subjugation because, just like the professor in our story, if one is steeped in European traditions, the academy can seem ideologically neutral and Eurocentric dominance may appear invisible. (p. 493)

The preceding excerpt refers to a story of a white college professor who sets out on a quest to become culturally competent. The professor does not succeed in his quest as he is not acknowledging his own Eurocentric biases (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). This line of thinking, or way of being, is extremely harmful as it ironically perpetuates colonization in an academic discipline that prides itself on the core values of social justice, diversity, and inclusion (Canadian Association of Social Workers [CASW], 2005).

Dumbrill and Green (2008) challenge the notion that efforts to incorporate Indigenous knowledge into western/Eurocentric institutions are helpful. Rather, what may be more helpful is to actually ally with Indigenous peoples. I understood the idea that I need to acknowledge my
own privilege as a white male and willingly agree to give up some of my own privilege to make space for Indigenous knowledge (Dumbrill & Green, 2008). In order to be fully accountable it is necessary to consult with Indigenous peoples, in order to understand how my biases and beliefs impact my professional practice. The social work profession can greatly benefit from including Indigenous knowledge into theory and practice.

The positive implications Indigenous knowledge can have for social work are numerous. Social work is an academic and professional discipline that prides itself on being social-justice and human-rights oriented (CASW, 2005). One positive implication is as simple as allowing social work to be consistent with its’ values. This may seem like an insignificant detail, but I believe that being authentic, genuine, and compassionate truly matters.

The following excerpt provides a wonderful example of the everyday challenges Indigenous academics face while working within an Eurocentric institution. Dumbrill and Green (2008) had taught a social work class in a space the day previous and wrote on the whiteboard requesting that the chairs be left in a circular formation:

The next day we entered the room and we were reminded of the resistance transformation will face and also the work still needed to stop European ways being automatically considered the norm. The chairs were neatly formed in rows, and the bottom part of our message had been erased so that the notice now reads: PLEASE RETURN CHAIRS. (p. 502)

Creating real space for Indigenous academics, elders, and community members to develop their own social work programming is essential.

My main motivation behind conducting my practicum with the Pe-kīwēwin project was to learn more about Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of being. More specifically, I
wanted to understand more about Indigenous knowledge, so that I could apply what I have learned to improve my practice as a clinical social worker. To be clear, it was not my intent to swoop in, learn a few new things, and then fall into the trap of cultural appropriation. Rather, I wanted to walk away with ideas for how I could better connect with Indigenous clients to whom I provide counselling services. One of the essential things I learned that will influence my work from this point forward is that relationality is absolutely essential (Wilson, 2001, 2008; Baskin, 2011). It is important that as a counsellor I focus on connecting with Indigenous clients in a reciprocal way, rather than coming from the angle of me being the sole “expert.” Reciprocity can involve me being willing to share my own stories or information about who I am as a person and as a social worker.

Self-disclosure is something I have constantly veered away from as I was originally taught that self-disclosure places clients at risk, and selfishly places attention on me as the counsellor. I am now viewing self-disclosure as a practice that, when used appropriately, can help to build rapport between clients and myself. Most importantly I have learned that I can take on a lead role within my agency when it comes to consulting with Indigenous social workers, community members, and elders, in regards to best practice. Essentially what I am suggesting, although perhaps bold, is a fundamental shift in how I view my own role and provide counselling services to Indigenous clients. I am merely one part of the system, and my job is to help moderate rather than dictate goals for service.

Through my experience on the Pe-kīwēwin project, I have reflected on the idea that my preconceived notions and beliefs about social work resulted in fragmentation of problems. Rather than looking at an individual as a part of a larger system or community, I have been trained to pathologize the individual and to focus solely on an individual creating change. I need
to challenge westernized methods of clinical counselling that I currently use in my practice, including Cognitive Behavioral therapy, Narrative therapy, and solution focused counselling. I am working on applying the above mentioned knowledge in order to improve my practice as a social worker.

Several of the clients I work with self-identify as being of Indigenous ancestry. Although statistics are not available in domestic violence annual reports, I approximate that 30-50% of clients to whom I provide services are of Indigenous ancestry. Unfortunately, this is consistent with Canadian national domestic violence statistics (Statistics Canada, 2013). As a social worker educated and trained in Saskatchewan I am aware, albeit at a beginner’s level, that the overrepresentation of Indigenous peoples accessing domestic violence treatment programming is due to a complex set of factors relating, in large part, to colonization. Unfortunately, knowing this information provides me with little, if any, practical knowledge that can result in more effective services; I am operating within a western/Eurocentric framework, as well as within a medical model of care, that pathologizes individuals, often without examining other important factors that may be contributing to the lives of the clients I serve.

When I begin working with a client, the first thing I am supposed to have them do is fill out approximately 20 pages of mandated paperwork. I am then supposed to ask them a series of questions, not all of which I truly understand the purpose of, in order to create a client profile consistent with western practices. At times, I feel as though I am more concerned with details than with actually connecting to and building a rapport with the people I serve. This is inconsistent with Indigenous knowledge, which suggests that I should value relationality and reciprocity (Wilson, 2001, 2008; Baskin, 2011).
Thus, I have incorporated acts of resistance into my daily practice as a social worker in order to connect with my clients. In order to focus more on building rapport and connection, for instance, I have clients fill out paperwork that is only absolutely essential. Other nonessential documents, such as various scales and screening tools, are placed aside in order to focus on getting to know clients that I serve. I have also begun sharing more about my own values and beliefs, when appropriate, in order to create common ground between my clients and I.

As a fourth practicum objective I chose to gain more understanding into the daily activities and processes a research practicum student performs.

**Learning as a Research Practicum Student**

It was important that I learned to perform daily responsibilities expected of a research practicum student in order to complete my practicum. One of the main activities I performed involved completing administrative tasks. Administrative tasks included contacting archival institutions, including the Glenbow Museum in Calgary and the United Church in Toronto, in order to learn how to access material related to the ICRS. In order to perform daily tasks I had to focus on becoming self-directed and self-motivating, as I often worked independently. I took initiative to learn new programs central to the project. Programs such as Asana, NVIVO, and Zotero allowed me to network with other team members, and learn how to store and analyze data. I attended archival research training in Saskatoon and in Ottawa in order to learn more about the archival research process.

Another essential task was to attend meetings with fellow practicum student Scott Morrison and with research assistant Priscila da Silva. Priscila, Scott, and I often worked alongside one another on various projects related to the *Pe-kīwēwin* project. For example, we reviewed the same archival documents to gather relevant information, completed annotations
together, and co-wrote an article for publication together. The article titled *Indigenous Research, Colonialism, and the Profession of Social Work* refers to our individual experiences working on the *Pe-kīwēwin* project. I reflected on my personal experience as a white male working on a project rooted in Indigenous research methodology. I discussed my role as a research practicum student, as well as provided insight into my personal and professional obligations to acknowledge my own privilege and participate in decolonization. Co-authoring this article was challenging and exciting. The challenging aspect stemmed from a need to include each of our perspectives, as well as to properly coordinate with each other in order to properly structure our article. The excitement stemmed from the possibility of being a part of a published paper. Currently, Priscila, Scott and I are in the process of providing the final touches to our article to prepare for submission to an academic journal. I believe I achieved my research objectives by being committed to learning, open minded, and through assertive communication with fellow *Pe-kīwēwin* members.

In Chapter Six I discuss personal recommendations arising out of my research practicum learning, that may contribute to reconciliation in social work practice and the social work profession in general.
Chapter Six: Recommendations and Conclusion

Recommendations

Through reflecting on my research practicum experience in an Indigenous context, I have learned that social work as a profession and as an academic discipline must embrace Indigenous knowledge in order to promote reconciliation. As a result, I have come up with three recommendations for social work practice. My first recommendation calls for social work agencies to actively consult with Indigenous academics, social workers, and community members in order to improve service delivery. My second recommendation is for social work agencies to ensure that there is a representative number of Indigenous social workers and helpers providing services to clients for any social work related service. Finally, my third recommendation is for the Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers to require all registered social workers to attend Indigenous cultural competency training as a separate part of continuing education.

In my work I often feel like my hands are tied by bureaucracy. My current workload is often greater than I can adequately fulfil. Emphasis is on proper documentation and on the upkeep of client files, as well as professional training. What I find sadly ironic is that although I work with several Indigenous clients, none of the training I am required to attend provides me with knowledge and skills designed to help improve service delivery to Indigenous peoples. In fact, I am not exactly sure how I would even go about getting proper training designed to help me assist Indigenous clients. Nor am I required to have any specific training designed to improve how I provide counselling services to Indigenous clients. All the professional counselling training I have received has been delivered by people of non-Indigenous ancestry, which is clearly problematic.
What I propose is that my agency, as well as other agencies serving Indigenous peoples, actively hire and consult with Indigenous academics, social workers, and community members in order to promote transparency, and to facilitate truly culturally competent practices. As has been written about, it is difficult and in some cases impossible to provide culturally competent practice while being inside a Eurocentric system, and without consulting with Indigenous peoples (Dumbrill & Green, 2008; Taiaiake, 2009). The change that I recommend within my agency and other social work agencies is to embrace consultation with Indigenous social workers, community members, and leaders regarding program practices. I make this recommendation because in my research practicum placement I learned that a lack of consultation with Indigenous peoples in regards to child welfare service delivery contributed to the ICRS and systemic oppression. The recommendation for consultation would be to ensure that adequate services, consistent with Indigenous knowledge, are being provided by MHAS staff.

Another recommendation is to ensure that a representative example of Indigenous social workers and helpers are providing services to clients in MHAS and other agencies. I make this recommendation because I believe that structural changes need to occur in order for government agencies to provide culturally competent services to Indigenous peoples. In order for structural changes to occur a representative sample of Indigenous peoples must be employed and involved in decision making at all levels. I am aware that this recommendation may be difficult to achieve due to systemic racism, but I still believe that until Indigenous peoples have control over service delivery, things will remain the same.

My final recommendation places the responsibility for culturally sensitive service delivery onto registered social workers. I make this last recommendation because I discovered, during the course of my placement, that I am lacking in professional training when it comes to
cultural safety, or in providing culturally competent services to Indigenous peoples, and I believe this has to do with the oppressive nature of the western structures within which I currently work as well as the general lack of cultural competence training. My experience was immersive in that I had the opportunity to both learn about Indigenous issues through research, but also through the experience of working with a primarily Indigenous research team. This experience allowed me to see how I can have a role in creating an alliance with Indigenous peoples, as well as how I can advocate for structural changes in social work. According to the Code of Ethics (2005), social workers are required to be culturally competent and to be mindful of how their services impact clients (CASW, p. 4). What I find problematic is that we as social work professionals, myself included, are not truly aware of how our own privilege and personal narrative impacts clients.

Each year, as part of continuing education, social workers in Saskatchewan are required to complete a number of hours in order to become eligible for registration. One thing I have reflected on is that in a province where Indigenous peoples are disproportionately involved in the healthcare system, child welfare system, and prison system, social workers have no formal obligation to receive training designed to improve service delivery for Indigenous peoples. I find this to be extremely problematic and believe that it conflicts with social work values and ethics.

Furthermore, in my anecdotal experience, there are many social workers in Saskatchewan providing services to Indigenous peoples. Thus I recommend that the SASW requires social workers to complete a separate set of continuing education requirements, specific to cultural competency with Indigenous peoples. These educational requirements would be designed by Indigenous academics, social workers, and community members. Furthermore, an external review lead by a committee of Indigenous peoples would examine the effectiveness of the newly implemented cultural competency protocol as a part of continuing education.
Conclusion

When I began my research practicum with the Pe-kīwēwin project I had very little understanding of Indigenous knowledge. I focused on coming from a place of humility and openness in order to understand Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices. I acknowledged my historical role in regards to colonization, as well as examining my own Eurocentric biases and beliefs. I studied literature by Dominelli (2002) and Baines (2007, 2009) in order to learn how to incorporate AOP into social work practice. Bennet et al. (2011) provided me with insight as to how to form an alliance with Indigenous peoples. Through reflecting on the literature, my own story, and personal location, I came to important realizations. I believe I have an ethical and moral responsibility to use my privilege in order to challenge oppression. Furthermore, I must actively work to let go of some of my privilege in order to create space for Indigenous ways of knowing. In that regard, my theoretical approach of AOP was very helpful.

Being a part of the Pe-kīwēwin team allowed me to learn from a wide variety of influential people. I had the opportunity to connect with Indigenous archivists, social workers, lawyers, and historians who accepted me into their circle, providing me with opportunities to learn valuable lessons. I was able to complete my four learning objectives.

For my first learning objective, for example, I was able to attend archival research training led by archivists in Saskatoon and in Ottawa. I learned how to search for archival research using finding aids, as well as how to order archival material. I examined archival documents related to the exploitation of Indigenous families and children on sugar beet farms in Southern Alberta. I also examined archival documents related to provincial child protections’ in Saskatchewan.
For my second learning objective I was able to review a large pool of literature pertaining to child welfare and transracial adoption. Of particular interest were research studies examining the harmful effects of transracial adoption on Indigenous children, and commissioned reports including the Kimelman report (1985), Report on the Commission of Aboriginal peoples (1996), and Lavallee’s report on Jordan’s principle (2005). I summarized and annotated multiple sources, contributing to an extensive pool of literature that will be used by Pe-kīwēwin team members.

For my third learning objective I spent a significant amount of time learning about Indigenous research knowledge in order to gain insight into and understanding of the guiding principles behind the Pe-kīwēwin project. For example, I studied works by Baskin (2011) and by Wilson (2001, 2008) in order to gain insight into Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing. I was able to examine and reflect on the implications Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous research can have for social work theory and practice. Furthermore, I was able to reflect on how Indigenous research knowledge can be applied to my own work as a counsellor.

Indigenous knowledge can challenge western practices that tend to pathologize clients and focus on the individual. Important values consistent with Indigenous knowledge, such as reciprocity and relationality, have significant implications for social work practice because they challenge the notion that social workers are the experts. Relationality and reciprocity further ensure that social workers are open and transparent about their own biases, values, and beliefs with clients.

For my fourth learning objective I was able to gain knowledge into the daily responsibilities of a research practicum student. This included attending weekly meetings with project team members, and collaborating on projects with fellow practicum students and research assistants. The experience I gained while being a part of the Pe-kīwēwin project has provided me
with valuable lessons that I plan to incorporate into my existing practice in order to be a more effective social worker.

Indigenous research knowledge has significant implications for social work theory and practice. As a profession and academic discipline, social work encompasses values that promote social justice, diversity, and inclusion (CASW, 2005). Indigenous research knowledge differs from western knowledge as it is based on values of reciprocity, relationality, transparency, and understanding (Baskin, 2011; Wilson, 2008). Thus embracing Indigenous research knowledge is consistent with social work values of diversity and inclusion. Social work can benefit by creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing. In regards to direct practice, social workers who take time to learn about Indigenous knowledge have a better opportunity to form an alliance with their clients (Bennet et al., 2011). In essence, implementation of Indigenous research knowledge may lead to improvements in social work theory and practice and promote cultural competency.
References


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