Teachers’ Perceptions of Project of Heart,
An Indian Residential School Education Project

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Sylvia Rose Smith, candidate for the degree of Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction, has presented a thesis titled, *Teachers’ Perceptions of Project of Heart, An Indian Residential School Education Project*, in an oral examination held on April 18, 2017. The following committee members have found the thesis acceptable in form and content, and that the candidate demonstrated satisfactory knowledge of the subject material.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to gain insight into how settler teachers took up an arts and activist-based Indian Residential School Commemoration Project called Project of Heart. More specifically, it sought to assess whether or not the research participants were led to transformation, demonstrated through disrupting “common sense” (racist) behaviours of teachers and students as well as through their engagement in social justice work that Project of Heart espouses.

Since 2007 Ontario school boards have been required by Ministry policy to teach the “Aboriginal perspective” in their high school courses, yet at the time of the study (2010) there were still very few resources available for educators to do so. There were even fewer resources available to teach about the Indian Residential School era. Project of Heart was created by an Ontario teacher and her students in 2007 in order to address this egregious situation.

The study was guided by grounded theory methods and the findings suggest that while Project of Heart did not achieve “transformation” in its participants as assessed through teachers’ lack of completion of the social justice requirement, teachers indicated that both students and teachers benefitted greatly because of the relevance of the learning. Included in the appendix are assessment and evaluation rubrics for Project of Heart.
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT........................................................................................................i

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS..................................................................................ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS.....................................................................................iv

LIST OF APPENDICES.....................................................................................vii

PREAMBLE....................................................................................................2

PREFACE......................................................................................................6

CHAPTER I:  INTRODUCTION..............................................................13
  Purpose of the study .................................................................13
  Rationale for the action research project.........................14
  Application......................................................................................17
  Project of Heart..............................................................................17
  Project of Heart intended outcomes....................................17
  Research questions......................................................................20
  Nomenclature...............................................................................21

CHAPTER II:  REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE..............................22
  To enhance settler knowledge of Indian Residential Schools 22
  To foster settler understanding of trauma caused by IRS experience...23
  To encourage settler reflection on the destructive nature of their value system.24
  To incorporate knowledge from the Survivor community........26
  To provide an opportunity for settler Canadians to engage in the political process.................................28
  Project of Heart as action..........................................................29

CHAPTER III:  THE MILIEU.............................................................32
  Mission Statement.......................................................................32
  How Project of Heart works....................................................33

CHAPTER IV:  METHODOLOGY......................................................35
  Method.............................................................................................35
  Modes of data collection..........................................................36
    Interview guide.........................................................................36
    Participant (teacher) profiles.................................................37
    Participants and procedure................................................39
    Procedure for interviews....................................................40
  Data analysis..............................................................................43
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS ......................................................... 47
Main findings ........................................................................ 47
Challenges to teachers ................................................................. 49
Challenges teachers perceived students faced while doing
   Project of Heart ........................................................................ 60
Positive impacts Project of Heart had on teachers.................... 64
   Greater depth of learning.......................................................... 64
   Personal responsibility to speak up............................................ 68
   Offered opportunities to address injustices............................. 68
   Relationship building with other teachers............................... 69
   Personal fulfillment and professional growth........................ 70
   Importance of experiential learning validated......................... 74
Teacher Perceptions of Project of Heart’s impact on students.... 76
   Raising the bar........................................................................ 77
   At-risk students...................................................................... 78
      Confidence-building............................................................ 79
      Anti-bullying aspect.......................................................... 81
   Heart/Spirit or relational learning........................................... 82
      Learning as therapy............................................................ 83
      Reflecting on their learning.................................................. 85
      “Making it real”................................................................. 92
      Going beyond the curriculum............................................. 92
   Empowering the students....................................................... 95
      Connecting students to political process............................. 96
      Connecting students to prior experiential knowledge.......... 101
      “Real time, real world”....................................................... 104
      Ripple effect........................................................................ 107
Summary of Findings................................................................. 109

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION ...................................................... 113
Parts of Project of Heart actually completed by teachers.......... 113
Embracing contradictions........................................................... 114
   Difficulties for teachers........................................................ 114
      Inadequacy of training........................................................ 114
      Emotionally draining subject matter................................. 115
      Teachers unsure how to do social justice........................... 116
   Unforeseen connections: “Heart/Spirit” relational learning.... 117
      Students with their teachers............................................... 117
      With their classmates....................................................... 118
      With the wider community............................................... 119
      With their history............................................................ 120
      To Aboriginal peers......................................................... 121
      Civic engagement............................................................ 121
      With the natural environment............................................ 122
APPENDICES

Appendix A – Circular Rubric: Assessment and Evaluation..........................141
Appendix B – Comparative Analysis of Learning: Indigenous vs Western
    Worldview........................................................................142
Appendix C – Questionnaire...................................................................143
Appendix D – Interviewing Guide.............................................................145
Appendix E – Letter of Invitation..............................................................147
Appendix F – Consent Form....................................................................148
PREAMBLE

Project of Heart was originally conceived as a learning module that my students and I would manage together in class. However, through various networks (educators’ professional development days, word-of-mouth, an online blog), it soon gained a profile that took it well beyond the ability of one teacher and a continually-changing student body to manage. My students and I had every confidence that it would be successful, but we had no idea how we would manage the growth of something that had no funding and no real plan in place for “scaling up”.

I believed I had set a solid ethical foundation for integrity of the project by reaching out to Indigenous and non-Indigenous historians to seek their opinions on how to present such a horrific history. I asked questions like: Do we call the huge numbers of children’s deaths “genocide”? Do we have any idea of the numbers of children that died? If there aren’t numbers, how do we symbolically commemorate the children who died using tangible objects if that number is not known? What are the possible risks associated with bringing this extremely unsettling history into the consciousness of mainstream (white) Canadians who, as a group, are so deeply implicated in the systemic sufferings of nations of Indigenous peoples? I vetted the original proposal created in Dr. Spooner’s class through four local Indigenous Elders to get their “OK” to continue. An Ojibway Elder
actually named it “Project of Heart” after reading the proposal. Support from strong and
ambitious local settler allies also made this project one which started in a school, but
which the community saw as helpful in meeting some of its own needs.

I was confident Project of Heart was off to a solid start from an ethical point of view, but
I also took encouragement from the way it was spreading organically – one teacher’s kit
at a time. There was no governing body from which to provide, or take away funding,
and it was therefore impossible to shut down. A network of sympathetic educators could
sustain it at virtually no expense, so I knew that it had potential for long-term success in
mainstream classrooms. And, because of its easy adoption (all that was needed was a
desire to learn – with open hearts and minds, preferably) into any context, soon requests
to participate in Project of Heart came from the Indigenous community as well.

The first national event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was in held in June
of 2010, in Winnipeg. The programming officers contacted me and Project of Heart was
invited to exhibit 6,000 decorated tiles at The Forks as part of a program that was geared
to both IRS Survivors and the general public. That same year, three years into the life of
Project of Heart, two community members approached me to request that I accept a
nomination for the Governor General’s Award for Teaching Excellence in History. I was
assured that the nomination would be a community effort (they stopped after acquiring 50
names to put on the official nomination form) and I was advised that if I accepted and I won, it would give the Project a national profile. In 2011, I won that award and the advice I received turned out to be correct.

That honour, combined with exposure on national television through the three-part CBC documentary film “Eighth Fire”, catapulted Project of Heart forward into a space that became difficult for me to manage. It had grown in leaps and bounds, and by late in 2011, it was all I could do to manage a full-time job, my home and family life, and Project of Heart. My thesis work was put on hold.

Project of Heart had now grown to be a national endeavour through partnering with Charlene Bearhead of the Native Counselling Services of Alberta, who through her work with the National Day for Healing and Reconciliation, had the commitment to take POH on the road. She presented it to education ministries and school boards across Canada, and by 2013 it had been taught in over 3000 schools in every province and territory. The completed tiles from Phase I of Project of Heart reside in the archives of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, and a display featuring the Project can be found in the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. In June of 2015, for my work in founding Project of Heart, I was named as an Honourary Witness to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission at its closing event in Ottawa. In the fall of 2016, Project of Heart was
presented as an exemplary Reconciliation Education Project to the delegates at the opening of the General Assembly of the Organization of American States in Washington, D.C.

At the time of writing, Project of Heart has regional partnership agreements with the British Columbia Teachers’ Federation, The University of Regina Faculty of Education, the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, The University of Ottawa, and the Community Learning Centres of Québec.

I continue to be involved in the day-to-day work of Project of Heart, and the deeper my connection to it grows, the greater is my sense of gratitude for the opportunity to meaningfully reflect on the Project’s efficacy and impact that this study has provided.

In the way of clarification, the interviews were all completed in the spring of 2010, just as the second Truth and Reconciliation Commission was being created. The majority of work on the thesis was completed by 2010 and therefore, the review of the literature reflects this timeframe.
PREFACE

My name is Sylvia Smith and I am one of five granddaughters of uninvited guests to Treaty 6 area. Their names were Stewart and Rebecca Smith, and like many settlers arriving in Saskatchewan at turn of the last century, they were Americans from the midwest states. The homestead they settled was still part of my family’s farm when I was born in 1957, and it remains in the family today. After a childhood spent on this farm, I was educated at the University of Saskatchewan, travelled extensively, and worked in various countries around the world. I have lived for the past 30 years on unceded Algonquin Territory (Ottawa, Ontario) where I taught in the Alternative School system from 1990 until my retirement in 2016.

As recently as fifteen years ago, I would never have described myself and the place where I grew up in relation to the territory of the Plains Cree who once traversed the land my family now farms. I would never have imagined that in my comfortable middle-age I would not only have a relationship with, but hold a responsibility to the very people I had learned at an early age to never pay heed to, or to speak about in other than dismissive terms.
My student experiences with formal education, both grade school and university, were
typical. I knew that I needed an education, and therefore took the information I was given
seriously, though only as a means to an end – the end being a “respectable” career. This
would enable me to live comfortably while being a good citizen and to uphold the virtues
of my Christian upbringing (compliance, acceptance, forgiveness) and reap the rewards
that were clearly the due of those who manifested the Protestant work ethic. Save for a
few anomalies which could be explained away by a presiding authority, I had been
presented with – and compliantly had taken to heart – a complete narrative that reassured
me that my life had purpose and my future would be good.

But despite the comforts of such a complacent world view, I was still an unnaturally
anxious child. This was all the more reason to conduct myself according to the strictures I
had absorbed. If I did so, and above all else was ‘nice’ – then I would not have to concern
myself with anything more. My family and my community of like-minded people who
looked like me, lived like me, talked like me, and believed like me, were the only people
I ever imagined I needed to be accountable to. For the others whose misfortune landed
them outside this circle, there was Christian charity, and I embraced it, at church, as a
volunteer, and as a pennies-per-day “foster parent” to a Bolivian child in need. Taken as a
whole, I had been given a strong and well-built framework for living, one that clearly
served my nearest and dearest well. I had no cause to question any of it.
But as the years passed, certain doubts began to surface. I could describe them as questions I didn’t want to know the answers to. These questions began to multiply during a 1970s liberal arts education that included a stint at St. Andrew’s College, the Saskatoon seminary of the United Church of Canada. It was this period that introduced the first real cracks into the firm foundation of my upbringing, as my perspective was challenged by exposure to concepts like feminism, liberation theology, and social justice. This ultimately led to me openly challenging my parents’ belief system, a process so painful that it eventually saw me estranged from my family for over five years. During this time I travelled and worked overseas to avoid dealing with the schism that had opened up between two very different versions of my being.

Eventually I came back got Canada, completed a Bachelor of Education, took a job teaching, formed a life with a partner and experienced the joys and the anxieties of raising a family. After a particularly challenging set of personal experiences at my school, I was inspired to go back to university. I had a strong desire, a passion, to learn why things were the way they were and how power works the way it does, especially within institutions and organizations that I still viewed with respect, despite their faults and inconsistencies. I had long ago lost my belief that the status-quo was pre-ordained or
“natural”, but it would be fair to say that I still thought it was there for a good reason, and that it could work, if only everyone did what they were supposed to do.

The field of interest I immersed myself in was Native Studies. I took any courses I could manage to fit into a full-time working, young-children-at-home, mother’s schedule. I needed to learn, at a foundational level, how power worked. I soon learned that “I” was my biggest hurdle to getting to the root of my quandry. Being a white, middle-class professional English-speaking fully-abled cis-gendered woman, when I finally held the mirror up and closely examined what I saw, I was appalled at the ignorance with which I had lived my life. After all, all of my education to date, including my B. Ed degree, had come from a place that assumed “society” (my people) were on the right track, and if we ever found ourselves short of knowledge we could find it in the books we had written, and further guidance would be provided by those who were “certified” to give it. Even the brand of social justice I had become familiar with in my theology days was deaf to the inherent conflict between Indigenous epistemologies and the Eurocentric world view, and had instead described the nature of this clash of cultures as “the Third World on our doorstep”.

Native Studies seemed to offer something more. I now had a voracious appetite for learning about the things I hadn’t been taught. It felt like I was making up for 17 years of
schooling where real problems had never been properly named. This epiphany not only helped me to realize my blindness to my own systemic privilege, it also offered the possibility for transformation. I realized that if a passion for the kind of learning that incorporated working for justice was so present within me, it might be present within my students as well, if they were given the same opportunity to learn. I had come to believe an education driven by empathy – as I understood it, the key component of Indigenous ways of knowing – could provide personal meaning and purpose to balance the objective, the technical, the “rational” learning that had been both all I had known and all I had been teaching – and which was manifestly failing so many of my students.

This hope led me to take a totally different approach in the classroom. Around 2005, I began to view my students differently. I started to avidly glean as much information from them as I could about their own lives. My new “bible” was a manual on how to collect oral history. My students began to view their own families and their own experiences as a template for a more personal and meaningful engagement with history. They accepted the invitation to view themselves as historians doing critical inquiry and making profound discoveries. I began to see my students and their families as vast repositories of knowledge – knowledge that was unique and had the capacity to provide them with agency and power, if they acknowledged it. Mainstream education couldn’t give it credit because after all, how would it ever measure suffering, pain, courage, or resilience?
These same Alternate System students who were considered highly at risk for academic failure (“Last Chance High” was the unofficial name of my school) were from exactly the kinds of disadvantaged backgrounds that public education is meant to ameliorate, yet public education didn’t really want to know who they were.

My Native Studies had started me conceptualizing “knowledge” in a different way and now I was viewing curriculum and course content for through a different lens as well. My personal teacher’s guide – the mental filing system of assignments and exercises all teachers carry with them to work everyday – was suddenly transforming, flipping its magnetic field to a learner-centered approach.

The results were amazing. As soon as students realized that I was honouring and giving agency to the work they were doing, they wanted to do more. The learning wasn’t cajoled, or “fakey”. The learning they were doing spoke to them in ways that previous learning hadn’t. These kids wanted action. They couldn’t see the sense in learning about historical injustices – like Indian Residential Schools – without doing something with their knowledge. They wanted to act on contemporary issues affecting Indigenous people today, things they knew were going on because they heard about it in the news or they were living it themselves. Because they hadn’t known the truth about Canada’s historical record, some even betrayed by their education. Their emotions were engaged, and that
acted as the fuel that would inspire them to do something with their new knowledge. For them, history wasn’t “the past”. It was “now”.

This brings me to the creation of Project of Heart and to the point of why I was eager to work so hard. It was because the youth I worked with proved that they could transform education into something much more meaningful than it was. My students learned to create history because they realized their power to effect change. I had their faith, and they had mine, and Dr. Marc Spooner had faith in the project as well when, during a Social Justice course he taught in 2007, he agreed to my request to receive class credit for a proposal I would write to the fledgling Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the creation of a learning module called Project of Heart.
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the value of employing a decolonizing module (Project of Heart) in teaching about the Indian Residential School era in Canada. This value will be assessed through the reactions to Project of Heart on the part of students and teachers following their experience of the project as demonstrated in their increased awareness and willingness to take action. The problem examined is that for Project of Heart to be transformative (having the power to disrupt ‘common sense’ behaviours that constitute oppressive ways of relating with each other) it must, when completed, leave participants with a commitment to challenge and change racist conditions and practices that make continued colonization possible. For this paper then, the question is “Has Project of Heart led to transformation, demonstrated through disrupting the status quo or disrupting “common sense” behaviours, of teachers and students?” The Project of Heart module (also referred to in this study as “POH”, “the Project”, or, “the module”) seeks to elicit transformational learning by teaching from an Indigenous ally’s perspective. It is expected that examining the module's effectiveness will suggest future steps that will enhance teaching outcomes. More broadly, the study is expected to elicit a better understanding of both the obstacles and the opportunities encountered by mainstream
teachers as they attempt to teach about the Indian Residential School (IRS) era in Canada.

*Rationale for the Action Research Project*

Despite the official apology given to survivors of the Indian Residential Schools by Prime Minister Harper in June of 2008 for Canadian policy that "had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language" (Harper, 2008, p.6850), non-Aboriginal Canadians remain largely uninformed about – and imagine themselves distanced from – the impact of the Indian Residential School era on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Despite Canada's deliberate and persistent assimilationist policies across generations of First Peoples (Archibald, Castellano & DeGagné, 2008), in a CBC website survey asking what Canadians think of Canada, out of 122 posts submitted by March 16th, 2010, only 3 posts were critical of Canada's treatment of Aboriginal Peoples (CBC, 2010).

Such widespread ignorance is unsurprising given that the topic of Indian Residential Schools is a lightly touched-upon area of study in Canadian public education. For example, many high schools in Ontario still use history textbooks printed in 2002, six years before the official apology. Ken Montgomery, an academic at the University of Regina, has stated that it isn’t unusual for textbooks to be approved by various Ministries of Education for decades after their publishing date (Montgomery 2005, 2006). One standard text, *Canada, Face of a Nation* (Bolotta, Hawkes, Jarman, Keirstead & Watt,
2000) is approximately 400 pages long and covers Canada's contemporary history – 1900 to present. Following the expectations as set out in the Ontario curriculum, it offers an explanation of the IRS era which is exactly 67 words long. Another commonly-used text, *Canada, A Nation Unfolding* (Newman, 2000) makes reference to the IRS era in two places, for a total of 140 words. Montgomery (2005) also analyses the racism and nationalism within these two textbooks. There is no mention of Indian Residential Schools within the Aboriginal Education Strategy folder of the Ontario Ministry of Education's elementary school curriculum. Benign neglect – if not deliberate inaction – insures that students undertake little analysis, critical or otherwise, of Canada’s policies, past or present, toward First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

There is no lack of well-argued challenges and disruptions to the dominant narrative of Canada as a fair and just nation-state. For example, Thobani (2007) debunks the myth that Canada has become a place of equity, where “race” plays no part in the continuing project of nation building. Tim Stanley argues that racism has been absolutely integral to the development of Canadian institutions and Canadian society, as “privilege only exists in relation to someone else’s oppression” (Stanley, 2000, p. 99). Ghassan Hage (1998) also critiques white-controlled nation states and their attempts to create a multicultural society, while at the same time, maintaining control over increasingly diverse
populations. Montgomery (2005), through his critique of Canadian high school history textbooks, has demonstrated how Canada – as a white settler state – has enabled racism to flourish. All such arguments – and many more that buttress them – are largely omitted from Ministry-vetted history, and as a result of this curricular deficit, students graduate with an unchallenged belief in the dominant narrative of Canada as a fair and just country that embraces diversity and is a model of multiculturalism to the rest of the world (Mackey, 1999).

It is clear that is not for paucity of scholarship that K-12 curricula like Ontario’s miss out on a more critical edge. But for whatever reason – institutional inertia, bureaucratic stonewalling, normative filtering – the true story of the IRS era as a fundamental, defining aspect of Canadian history, remains largely untaught. It is only exposed to public consciousness in our schools – and in society at large – when it can no longer be entirely avoided. "Mistakes" by "bad apples" in an otherwise "loving and caring barrel" of priests, nuns, bureaucrats, and politicians is how the story is often presented (R. Chrisjohn, personal communication, March 9, 2010). Nonetheless, some pedagogues grapple with this topic when it finds a context for discussion, and when they do, they find that learners experience a variety of conflicting emotional responses. This investigator’s experience is that some students are empathetic and desirous of learning more, willing to be personally challenged, while others actively push back, resisting dialogue which might
see them challenge received notions of what it means to be Canadian in relation to
Indigenous peoples.

Application

My research will address an information deficit. Curricula designed to assist in the
teaching of non-dominant knowledges is not readily accessible to most mainstream
teachers; research on its efficacy is therefore limited in scope. Project of Heart is a
teaching module explicitly designed to remedy a curricular void in the teaching of
Canadian history. Therefore, it is expected that a careful examination of teachers’
perceptions of Project of Heart will reveal which elements work best and which aspects
need strengthening. Such a desired-for outcome is not hypothetical. Because of the close
relationship between this researcher and the Project itself, the results of this study will
inform practitioners of Project Of Heart and strengthen their efficacy in delivering the
Project.

Project of Heart

"Project of Heart" (POH) is an initiative that seeks to broaden and highlight a ‘silenced’
and ‘invisibilized’ history concerning the IRS era. Analogous teaching modules are
difficult to find, as might be expected considering what the unit really is – a Popular
Education project that can be both incorporated within mainstream K-12 classrooms and
presented via informal community learning contexts such as church groups, book clubs,
etc. It takes an Indigenous perspective in that it assumes learner responsibility is embedded in its very format. Bob Lovelace, who sat on a *Defenders of the Land* panel hosted during Indigenous Sovereignty Week in Ottawa, stated that “Indigeneity is a quality of life. It’s a matter of responsibility, of taking responsibility for the environment in which you live” (personal communication, October 30, 2010). Informed by the belief that learning and responsibility-taking are inseparable, POH's pedagogical approach is in alignment with an Indigenous perspective. It uses the properties of the medicine wheel as its theoretical framework. The four directions of the medicine wheel are taken to correspond to four components of the learner: mind, body, heart, and spirit. Such descriptors are purposefully used in place of broadly analogous professional terminology, such as cognitive, kinesthetic, and affective components. In setting down these analogs, I take encouragement from Parker (1993) who argues trenchantly that education is a spiritual journey as well as an intellectual one.

POH seeks to problematize mainstream understandings of the collective "common identity" that serve to reproduce hegemonic understandings and exclusionary practices (Montgomery, 2006). In doing so, it attempts to elicit an authentic learner engagement and offers opportunities for mainstream students to learn more about factual history. It also challenges them personally and collectively to realize their responsibilities and take action toward social justice. Ultimately, it is hoped that interrogating participants'
experience of this project will elucidate what methods are most effective in changing mainstream attitudes that obstruct the goals of restitution and reconciliation toward Canada's First Peoples.

**Project of Heart’s intended outcomes**

1. To enhance mainstream (settler) knowledge of the Indian Residential Schools experience.
2. To foster mainstream (settler) understanding of the inter-generational trauma caused by the Indian Residential School experience.
3. To encourage mainstream (settler) reflection on the destructive nature of a value system that privileges and legitimates economic pursuits of the settler population at the expense of the core asset of Original Peoples – their lands.
4. To incorporate Indigenous concerns with respect to efforts at teaching about Indian Residential Schools in a manner that empowers Indigenous peoples and unsettles the settlers' will to ignore, and situates learning in a decolonizing space where thoughtful and authentic engagement can happen.
5. To encourage mainstream Canadians to accept responsibility for past injustices in a manner that empowers them to address and confront current injustices perpetrated by Canada.
Research Questions

This study will examine the value of employing a decolonizing module (Project of Heart) in teaching about the Indian Residential School era in Canada. The objective of the current study will be to examine participant reactions after completing the Project of Heart awareness-raising/action-taking learning module. Guiding this objective will be the following research questions: 1) What were the challenges that teaching Project of Heart presented to the eleven participants themselves? 2) In doing Project of Heart, what did the participants perceive the challenges were for their students? 3) What were the positive impacts the teacher participants felt Project of Heart had for themselves? 4) What were the positive impacts the teachers perceived the Project had for their students? These questions are vital because finding out what teachers embrace or what they resist takes us, as educators involved in creating curricula, to teach toward social justice – much closer to the nub of our task. Simply put, taking action can empower people or it can scare them; teaching for justice, therefore, is not akin to traditional classroom teaching. Some teachers might have difficulty in explaining mathematical concepts and so might be initially leery of teaching algebra, but that does not mean they would fear the consequences of their students actually learning how to do it. But, with teaching and learning towards social justice, we are faced with more than merely finding out what tool works and what doesn’t. Teaching and learning for justice, as per Kumashiro, brings the learner to a crisis point. Some teachers sense that point coming and want to go no nearer
to it – they resist. Others embrace the challenge, work through it, and relish the transformative power it holds for themselves and their students. Knowing what is resisted and what is embraced allows us to develop decolonizing methodologies – and accompanying tools – to bring more educators along with us as we teach for social change. Some of these specific tools are listed in this paper’s concluding remarks. To this end, a methodological approach borrowing certain techniques of Grounded Theory was employed.

In addition to the research questions listed above, in my discussion of the findings I will also seek to answer one further question: how did the understandings gained through carrying out this research impact my own understanding of Project of Heart?

Nomenclature

This study employs the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” are used to describe Canada’s First Peoples, and carry broadly the same meaning. “Settler”, “mainstream”, and “newcomer” are terms used to describe Canadians who do not identify as any of the first three terms.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The survey of literature is organized in broad congruence with the five goals of Project of Heart itself, as follows:

1. To enhance settler knowledge of the Indian Residential Schools experience.

The fact that mainstream Canadians know little about the Indian Residential School experience has been documented by many. For example, historian John Milloy (1999) states that it is critical that non-Indigenous people learn about the IRSs (p.xviii). In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was more than forthright when it, in its summation, called for mainstream Canadians to enact social and structural change that will see justice for Aboriginal people. "Information in school curriculums is limited. Media coverage is often unsatisfactory. Few governments, agencies, and organizations promote awareness of Aboriginal issues among members, employees, and colleges, yet without mutual understanding, a renewed relationship is impossible" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, p. 4). More recently, John Raulston Saul (2009) states, "The most basic need is to obtain knowledge and therefore understanding" (p. 313), as he addresses the barriers to reconciliation. Waziyatawin (2009) states that truth-telling efforts must be "conducted on a massive, public scale" (p.195) so that recognition (of land theft, genocide, colonization) and awareness of truth will compel some kind of action. Valerie
Galley (2009), Indigenous researcher and writer, states "Garnering support of the Canadian public, politicians, and public servants requires widespread public education so that they may learn the history of residential schools and what their legacy means, not only for Aboriginal people, but for Canadian society as well" (p. 255). Even a senior bureaucrat at Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), responsible for implementing Canada's largest court-ordered out-of-court settlement, laments the gargantuan task of educating the general public, when even "informed professionals are unaware of the enormity of the residential school phenomena" (Harrison, 2009, p. 153). Project of Heart addresses itself directly to this widespread knowledge deficit with a popular education module designed to bring better understanding to participants with little or no previous exposure to the real historical record around Indian residential schools.

2. To foster settler understanding of the trauma caused by the IRS experience.

Because most non-Indigenous Canadians assume that Indian Residential Schooling is something that happened "long ago", many can be easily persuaded that the social problems affecting Indigenous communities today, for example violence against women and children, substance abuse, unemployment, and high suicide rates, are indicative of an inherent moral or intellectual deficit in Aboriginal peoples themselves, rather than the result of an ongoing policy of assimilation (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003; Ross, 2009). Oppressive attitudes implicit in Canadian colonial settler understandings blind
non-Indigenous Canadians to their own complicity in perpetuating political, social, and economic marginalization of Indigenous people (St. Denis, 2007; Ng, 1993). Blithe belief in nationalist discourses (Montgomery, 2006) and the unconscious acceptance of Euro-centric cultural values has allowed mainstream Canadians to view the Indian Residential School era as a "blip" or a "mistake" on an otherwise near-flawless canvas of respect for racial diversity (Bear Nicholas, n.d.; Chrisjohn & Young, 2006; Alfred, 2005). In contrast, through the methodology employed by Project of Heart that requires thoughtful contemplation by participants of the historical facts the project seeks to explicate, it is expected that learners will be placed in a position to contextualize the ongoing assaults by colonial authorities (Canada) on the sovereignty of Indigenous people, and better understand systemic injustice as manifested by contemporary colonial (Canadian) policy.

3. To encourage settler reflection on the destructive nature of their value system

Canadian settlers are generally unaware that the conditions of their own existence in Turtle Island depend on a specific process of economic oppression. The result of such a process is the dispossessing of Indigenous people of the very things that they depend on for survival – land, livelihood, and children (Grande, 2004; Alfred, 1999 and 2005; Tinker, 2004; Smith, 2005; Richardson, 1991) all stolen through nefarious means by the Canadian State (Alfred, 1999, 2005).
Taiaiake Alfred and Sandy Grand are but two of scores of Indigenous scholars who concur that the individualistic and competitive values at the heart of the economic system espoused by nation states (e.g. Canada) are the real basis of relentless corporate attempts to appropriate and exploit material resources residing on Indigenous lands. (Alfred, 1999, 2005; Grande, 2004). The resultant disruption of traditional methods of sustaining human life impact on Indigenous peoples to the extent that indicators of their educational attainment, life-expectancy, and standard of living all rank alarmingly low – 68th on the UN Standard of Living Index, as opposed to 4th for Canada as a whole (Fogden, 2003).

The need for settler reflection on this state of affairs is a continued theme of Indigenous scholarship. Taiaiake Alfred states, "it is precisely the reluctance of the settler to investigate and indict his own actions and those of his ancestors that allows the injustice to compound continuously and to entrench itself within the dominant culture" (Alfred, 2009, p.186). Andrea Bear Nicholas (n.d.) and George Sioui (1992) extend their critique beyond the colonial appropriation of the Indigenous lands of Turtle Island and are adamant in their assertions that planetary life itself is being threatened because of Western values and their insistence on the unfettered freedom of global capital to do as it likes. Sandy Grande (2004) supplements this discourse with political theory when she concludes that it is Western democracy and its "history of democratically induced
oppression" (p.36), which laid a legal foundation for future genocidal acts against Indigenous people.

Set against the urgent need for reflection upon an Indigenous discourse that calls attention to planetary survival and possibilities of future genocide, we have the standard provincial curricula in which, far from examining other worldviews, "white privilege and 'difference' are normalized"... within a "national mythology that Canada has always been a fair country" (Schick and St. Denis, 2005, p.3). In contrast to wrapping the student in the comforting cotton-wool of such myths and legends, Project of Heart's artistic component conveys the deeper understanding necessary for the learner to respond to the actual historical record. Through Project of Heart's emphasis on artistic expression, the participants gain, as Elliot Eisner (2005) would attest, a more profound understanding of the how their world works.

4. To incorporate knowledge from the survivor community

Inviting representatives from the survivor community who are able to share direct knowledge of residential schools – or their legacy – with Project of Heart participants may be a step in what Waziyatawin (2009) calls "truth-telling", by which settler society can no longer deny crimes and misdeeds perpetrated against Indigenous people. As the topic of Indian Residential Schools is rarely taught, rendering it invisible in mainstream discourses, inviting a representative of the community of survivors into the
settler-dominated place of learning poses a novel challenge to settlers' collective sense of self – situating them as newcomers who are uninvited guests in Indigenous territory. At the same time, settler participants are provided with opportunities to think, reflect, and learn in ways that may have previously been unavailable to them.

Schick and St. Denis (2005) speak of the necessity of challenging those who hold systemic power to acknowledge that power and grapple with it; and in doing so, they bring it out into the open so it can be named and discussed (Asher, 2007). Without naming their privilege and acknowledging the assumptions behind their group's ascendancy, settlers will continue to practice racism whether aware of it or not, and enjoy the material benefits it affords them. Asher (2007) attests to the difficulty and indeed the exhausting nature of this type of pedagogical work. However, this difficulty also creates opportunity, as it is by listening to the Indigenous spoken word – thereby learning from the expert – that students are privy to another type of knowledge, one that is rarely heard in public schooling: that of the lived experience of the marginalized. Accordingly, Minnich (1990) maintains that we (mainstream North Americans) will not learn how to think and perceive in new ways if we do not listen and pay attention to the voices of those who have been silenced.

Knowledge that truly transforms will come about by examining contradictions that are
built into our settler mythology, for example, the denial of recognition, rights, freedoms, etc. to specific groups of people, despite official claims to the contrary, and challenging hierarchical systems of dominance that perpetuate injustice (Minnich, 1990). The Project of Heart participant, through experiencing an IRS survivor's story or a cultural worker's teaching/ceremony, is given an introduction to new ways of thinking, not just about themselves, but about whom they have learned to relate to as "the other", opening up the possibility for a transformative engagement to occur. By hearing a narrative from the Indigenous point of view, through "truth-telling" and exposure to history as understood by those who lived it, a possibility is created to confront and contest the widespread belief in the cultural inferiority of Aboriginal peoples. Once such notions are laid to rest, as Rupert Ross iterates (2009), it is to be hoped that settler respect and recognition of Indigenous cultural richness and diversity can be manifested and that the stage can be set for reconciliation. Acknowledging Alfred's (2009) "reluctance of the settler to investigate" (p. 186), Project of Heart learners are helped over and around the barrier that normally prevents mainstream Canadians from considering their received cultural values from the point of view of those "othered" by them.

5. To provide an opportunity for settler Canadians to engage in the political process.

It appears to be characteristic of Canadians to be increasingly disengaged with the affairs of day-to-day governance in our political institutions. The Canadian Council on Learning
(2006) states the following: *Voter participation rates are falling in Canada. In the elections between World War II and 1988, voter participation rates averaged close to 75%. However, in the four elections since 1988, turnout has declined steadily with every election and the average has fallen to 66 percent...* (p. 2) This most minimal act of civic participation – casting a vote once within a prescribed period of time to elect those who will ostensibly have our best (settler) interest at heart – is ignored by many. For example, the results of the federal election of 2008 show that 41% of those entitled to vote declined the privilege (Heard, 2010). This increasingly disturbing disengagement of many Canadians in the political process may be reflective of not only a cynicism toward our governing structures, but appears to signify an acquiescent population, particularly among the youth and women, that just don't find politics "interesting" (Thomas & Young, 2006). In confronting such apathy, Project of Heart provides an avenue for learners to engage in political action for justice, authentically and enthusiastically. It invites the learner into a place that envisions a new future, one that Indigenous scholar Sandy Grande (2004) elucidates, where the collective, taking action for justice now, can transform systems that are as damaging today to Indigenous people as Residential Schools were in earlier decades, a point Cindy Blackstock (2009) from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society has repeatedly made.

6. *Project of Heart as Action*

POH seeks to counter this apathy and to initiate small, yet significant steps towards
decolonizing. Becoming cognizant of the extremely unequal power relationships between settler Canadians and Indigenous Canadians and then addressing it in concrete ways, is the responsibility of those on the settler side of that equation. In the words of Taiaiake Alfred (2009), settlers must make things right "by offering us the dignity and freedom we are due and returning enough of our power and land for us to be self-sufficient" (p.182). Acting with this awareness, colonizers can do this by confronting those amongst them who hold the levers of power. This can be done with civic demonstrations of solidarity or letter-writing to Members of Parliament protesting injustices against Indigenous peoples, or demanding accountability of our institutions when their goals involve directly supporting infrastructure that buttresses ongoing Indigenous genocide, such as banking institutions that use Canadian taxpayers' dollars to subsidize multinational mining companies that are killing Indigenous people and their ecosystems. Decolonizing ourselves necessitates that we not be impartial observers (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Doing justice puts us solidly in an Indigenously-influenced realm where our cognitive orientation must be "toward relationships, processes, and flux..." (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, p.102) with a view to living in harmony with our environment.

POH’s claim is that participating in acts of social justice is an essential element of “walking the talk” of establishing right relations. It is our (settler) ancestors who created
Canada's liberal democracy or colonizing state apparatus and it is settler folk who materially benefit the most from its costly maintenance at the expense of Original Peoples. It is, therefore, the settlers' responsibility to commit to transforming it. Learning how to, and actually doing social justice actions creates possibilities for positive change in the circumstances of colonization which Alfred (2009) speaks of. As such, it can "provide a basis for considering the historical injustice" (p.186) brought on by Indian Residential Schooling. In this way, the "reconciliation within themselves" that Canadians need to accomplish, in order to acknowledge what has been done in their name, can take place (Younging, 2009, p. 327). This moral requirement to act on what has been learned is the working principle behind the social action component of POH whereby meaningful actions are taken by the learner to support the Indigenous people's legitimate claims to sovereignty. In our findings we will examine whether the participants’ experience of POH attains this desired outcome.
CHAPTER III: THE MILIEU

The mission language of Project of Heart and its step-by-step teacher’s guide are employed in the following section to provide us with a clear overview of the context of this study. What follows is what educators themselves would have read about the project, abstracted from the Project’s website at http://projectofheart.ca at it was during the period the data was collected.

Mission Statement

*Project of Heart is a hands-on, collaborative, inter-generational, inter-institutional artistic endeavour. Its purpose is to commemorate the lives of the thousands of Indigenous children who died as a result of the Indian Residential School (IRS) experience. It commemorates the families and communities to whom those children belonged. It is designed to bring awareness both to the settler community of predominantly European Canadians and communities of newer immigrants to Canada. A key objective of the project is to encourage ownership of this historic injustice by the non-Indigenous community.*

*By doing so, non-Aboriginal Canadians can then be moved to take responsibility for the continued oppression of Indigenous people in Canada, and be inspired to take action. POH also seeks to expand the opportunities available for the wisdom of Aboriginal Elders to be heard within Euro-educational/religious institutions.*
By joining with other groups who are making space for Indigenous knowledge, institutions can help to change attitudes and behaviours — hearts and minds — as Elders give voice to the traditions that were suppressed by residential schooling.

How Project of Heart Works

1. A Project of Heart kit is purchased. The kit contains books, newspaper articles, educational DVD, and blank, small wooden tiles. The number of tiles in the kit will correspond to a predetermined number that has immediate relevance for the partnering group involved. Each wooden tile represents the death of one Indigenous child due to the IRS experience.

2. The partnering group (school, worship community, workplace, etc.) does research to learn more about the IRSs and their impact on the students and their communities.

3. The group then chooses an IRS whose children will be commemorated.

4. Individuals within the group learn about the Indigenous peoples of the territory where the chosen IRS stands (or stood before being dismantled or torched). Participants then research the contributions made to Canadian society by that particular nation(s) or particular individuals of that nation(s).

5. Each group decorates the number of tiles in the kit.

6. A photograph of participants and their creations is taken which can be
uploaded to the POH site when the project is completed.

7. After decoration, an Elder and/or IRS survivor is invited to speak with the learners. A ceremonial smudging of the tiles by the invited Elder or survivor concludes the speaking engagement.

8. The learners research a current issue of relevance to a local Indigenous community and proceed with an "action" to address that issue. Alternatively, they may research an issue that affects all Canadian Indigenous peoples and express their concern to the appropriate official or administrator. Copies of letters or an explanation of what the individuals do can be sent to POH for uploading to the POH website.

9. The smudged blocks and participant photos are sent to the POH central location in Ottawa.

10. When all the IRS children that have been "lost" to memory are commemorated, the tiles will be offered to the Indigenous communities in Canada via the Truth and Reconciliation Commission who will curate in whatever way they deem fit: for actual examples, please see <http://poh.jungle.ca/>.
CHAPTER IV: METHODOLOGY

Method

As a practicing classroom teacher I was attracted to qualitative inquiry because it aligned well with the nature of the study's subject.

With its mission statement’s language in mind (abstracted in the previous chapter), it is clear that Project of Heart seeks to address curricular deficits in the teaching of Canadian history, and it was felt that research methods used to examine it should not align themselves with the fallacies of the discredited "empty vessel" conception of "transmitting" knowledge. As outstanding Native American educators Jack Forbes (2000) and Eber Hampton (1995) have it, most of the curriculum that is forced upon our young people – history included – is designed to be chunked into pre-determined segments and outcomes so that it can be tested by standardized methods, and then quantified.

Much is lost in such a pedagogical regime. And just as all of the life experience of the learners is ignored by such methods, a quantitative study would by its very methods only have scratched the surface of our participants' actual lived experience of teaching Project of Heart.
This study, therefore, was designed to be a conversive exercise, and the insights gained are co-created in the dialogue between subject and inquirer. An approach that adopts some of the techniques of Grounded Theory as outlined by Charmaz (2006) are what the current research adheres most closely to. Underpinning the study is my own anti-colonial, critical feminist perspective. In terms of the theoretical perspective, the grounded theory approach views the process as active as well as dialectical. The results are basically a “social construction of a social construction” (Spooner, 1999, p. 29) and the resulting data is a discovery, which is shaped by the questions asked that have been brought to the data. Ultimately, grounded theory practices are utilized in this study because it is expected such methods are most likely to uncover the deeply held views of the participants. It is these emic views that will eventually help to give agency to presenters and teachers in mainstream schools across Canada.

*Modes of Data Collection*

Interview Guide:

The interviews were conducted using a question guide that was designed to gain insight into the participants’ perceptions as they recalled their experience of participating in the Project of Heart learning module. Questions could be answered based upon a particular step or part of the Project (there are 5 parts), or on the Project as a whole. Because there was no supervisor or mentor to oversee and insure that all parts of the Project were
completed, or in fact, to insure that directions were followed at all, the participants were entirely free to discuss whatever they wished about what they did or did not do, and what they thought about the process.

There were 10 open-ended questions, each with approximately 3 sub-questions to help clarify the main question. It was hoped that the participant would be able to “pick up on” any relevant them and explain in more depth what his or her thoughts were on the topic.

Participant profiles

The eleven participants, six women and five men range in age from their 20s to their 60s. They all identify as non-Aboriginal. There are three “older” women teachers and three “younger” women teachers. All of the men with the exception of one (retirement age) are between 20 and 40 years of age.

Helen is a young female, and teaches Native Studies as well as history, in a school in a working-class area of Ajax, Ontario.

Maynard is a young male teacher, and teaches Native Studies for the Catholic School Board in a working-class area of Ottawa, Ontario.
Donna is an older female and teaches social studies in a middle-class school in Whitby, Ontario.

Rodwell is a young male Native Studies and history teacher who teaches in a large suburban school in Oshawa, Ontario.

Kevin is a young male who teaches history and the social sciences in a working-class school in Ajax, Ontario.

Sandra is a young female and teaches Native Studies and history for the Catholic School Board in Ottawa.

Nicole is an older female and teaches Native Studies, History, and French in Port Perry, Ontario.

Randall is a young male and teaches English, Philosophy, and Native Studies in Whitby, Ontario.

Sharon is an older female who teaches Native Studies in Whitby, Ontario.
Kelly is an older teacher who teaches Art (Native Art) for the Catholic School Board in Pembroke, Ontario.

Brian is an older teacher/administrator who administers the Native Studies portfolio in the Durham District School Board Office in Whitby, Ontario.

Participants and Procedure:

The participants for this study were chosen from a pool of teachers that were known to have completed the Project of Heart module (as it was outlined in the mission statement and teachers’ guide abstracted in Chapter III). Usefully, this was a group with whom this study’s author had a prior email correspondence. From this group, a sample was chosen to reflect a range of ages and a balance in those identifying as male or female. The majority of the participants were teachers from the Durham District School Board (DDSB) in the Greater Toronto Area, a school board that was known to have a strong partnership with Project of Heart. This facilitated the process of informed consent at the Board level. This sub-group comprised eight individuals. As well, two teachers who were known to have completed the Project in the Ottawa Catholic School Board agreed to join the study. A teacher from a nearby school board who was familiar with the Project was contacted and interviewed as well.

The eleven participants were all active in the Native Studies, Art, English, or History
departments with at least one year of teaching experience in the Native Studies area. One of the participants was the Program Officer for the Durham District School Board for Aboriginal Studies.

The interviews with the Durham District teachers took place over the course of a single day with the exception of one, which was done at a later date over the telephone. In each of the on-site interviews, I was able to secure an empty classroom or a private space within the school. I audio-taped the interviews for transcription purposes. Teachers were given their consent forms to fill out, as well as a short questionnaire. This process took approximately 10 minutes. The other three interviews were with teachers known to me (I had done teacher in-services with them regarding implementation of Project of Heart in their classes) and took place at local coffee shops in the city when the teacher could offer his/her free time. No interview took more than one hour and fifty minutes and the shortest one was thirty minutes.

Procedure for interviews

As previously discussed, all the research subjects were non-Indigenous teachers, all Euro-Canadians and all teaching in mainstream schools with a common curriculum. The objective of the current study was to examine their reactions after completing Project of Heart and to ascertain their perceptions of the Project. As well, the study sought to
ascertain the participants’ “resistance to”, or their “embracing of” Project of Heart
learning.

As mentioned previously, 8 of 11 participants were from the Durham District School
Board. The Aboriginal Programming Officer for the Durham District School Board acted
as the conduit through which I sought permission to do the study with this group. He sent
out a Board-wide email requesting responses from the teachers who had done Project of
Heart, and then advised me as to the ones that agreed to be interviewed. Seven such
teachers had stepped forward. I drove to the town of Whitby (the administrative centre of
the school board) and for one complete day, I conducted interviews at the teachers’
respective schools and at the Durham District Education Centre. While in the schools, I
was able to secure an empty classroom where we sat at a desk and audio-taped interviews
for transcription purposes. The interviews were conversational in nature, with the
occasional pausing for an explanation of terms, which some participants were unclear on.
At certain points in one or two of the interviews, participants expressed anxiety that they
might “get themselves into trouble” with what they said, but after assurance that
pseudonyms would be used, they were relieved and continued on with the interview.

The three other teachers were from schools closer to the Ottawa area and were
interviewed at Ottawa area coffee shops. One of them was interviewed in a car while
driving from Ottawa to her home in Pembroke, as that was the only time she had available to speak with me.

Before starting the interview, I explained to each participant that there were no “right” or “wrong” answers, and that I was not there to judge them on how well they did, or did not do, Project of Heart. A conversational style for interviewing teachers was adopted. This was to minimize their anxiety and to encourage them to speak freely. Before any any information was collected, participants read the invitation letter (see Appendix E) and then signed the consent form (see Appendix F).

All participants were teachers who had taught the Project of Heart module in their classrooms. Each had taught from a standard POH “kit” – a box of resource materials, including a DVD, educational booklets produced by the Legacy of Hope Foundation and Kairos, a collection of photocopied articles, a printed listing of possible social justice actions, a map of Canada with names and locations of historical IRSs displayed, photocopies of personal narratives from IRS students, blank wooden tiles, directions on how to compete POH, a list of materials included, and the name of the IRS whose victims the learner group would be commemorating. The majority of the teachers had completed only one “in-service” session, conducted either by myself or by a colleague who had experience teaching the Project of Heart module. Other than the two-hour “training
session”, there was virtually no other mentoring or supervision given to the teachers. They were entrusted to follow the directions in the kit, and to use the resources packed in the kit, to educate themselves on the topic. Teachers were given considerable freedom to implement Project of Heart as they saw fit. There were few prescriptions, other than that the educator should cover the five sections that the Project of Heart teaching module was composed of at that time (2010). It was up to the teacher to decide in what depth and detail each of the five parts would be taught to address the needs of the learners in whichever course of study (History, Art, Civics, Native Studies, etc) was being given.

**Data Analysis:**

Charmaz (2006), states that the grounded theory method “consists of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves” (p. 2). In congruence with Charmaz (2006), the study’s working understanding is that data and theories are not "discovered", rather: “we are part of the world we study and the data we collect. We **construct** our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives, and research practices”. Although theories that the researcher constructs **emerge** from the data, the researcher does not force preconceived ideas and theories **onto** the data, but recognizes that the researcher’s social positionings, values, and experiences have shaped the emergent theory. In the present study, an important by-product of
employing grounded theory guidelines was that it allowed the researcher to accept that her own “baggage” as a practitioner of the Project of Heart teaching module, while set to one side as the data analysis went forward, would colour the construction of the emergent theory.

But beyond the unavoidable observer bias that I bring to the study as the creator and first user of the Project of Heart teaching module, I must also acknowledge how I view myself within critical inquiry. For the purposes of doing this research, I used a critical constructivist approach. Throughout the data collection and analysis, I was cognizant that the theory I developed was an interpretation which depended on my views. As Charmaz (2006) argues, researchers must be aware of their presuppositions and understand how they will affect research outcomes. My views see me position myself within an anti-colonial framework as a white, middle-class, critical feminist.

Grounded theory researchers have not always agreed on the placement/timing of the literature review (Charmaz, 2006). For example, Glaser and Strauss (as cited in Charmaz, 2006), urge young grounded theorists to develop fresh theories and believed that the review of literature should be put off as long as possible in order that the researchers not be unduly influenced by the extant literature on the subject. Their belief that "the researcher does not want to be so steeped in the literature that he or she is constrained and
even stifled by it” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 49), has limited bearing on the methods proposed herein. In fact, positioning the review of the literature at the outset of the proposed study has been inseparable from its development, as the dearth of information that is otherwise available was the chief motivation for the creation of the educational module at the core of this study, Project of Heart. At the time of its inception there was next to no mainstream research extant that attempted to address the knowledge deficit created when the Euro-centric bias of the academy suppresses Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies (Sefa-Dei, 2007; Smith, 2006)

Employing Charmaz's (2006) guidelines for categorizing data, I used a two-stage process for coding. In the initial phase I developed a lexicon of short descriptors in order to label and log each piece of data, which is typically a line of text. Charmaz (2006) states that such coding is “how we select, separate, and sort data to begin an analytic accounting of them” (p. 46). In forming the descriptors or short names, emphasis should be on phrases that describe actions. Best practices for such coding is that it should stick closely to the data and keep simple and precise. This first-stage coding proceeds carefully, line-by-line, and helps the researcher to remain aware of "what people tell", "when they tell it" and "how people tell it"; all elements that matter much to the analysis. Throughout, I attempted to be mindful of Charmaz's warning to "make [my] codes fit the data rather than forcing the data to fit them" (p. 49).
Focused coding followed, where the researcher sifted “through large amounts of data” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57) employing the more significant or frequently-noted codes from the initial stage. Such coding has as one of its goals, to "determine the adequacy of the [initial] codes" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 57), but more importantly, it scaffolds from the initial coding. This encouraged the researcher to make conceptual links among statements contained with a given interview and between statements in separate interviews. This also helped to determine which initial codes "make the most analytic sense to categorize your data incisively and completely" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 58).

Between data collection and the actual drafting of a paper lay the intermediate step of memo-writing, often including "early memos" and "advanced memos" (Charmaz, 2006, pp. 81-82). The early memos allowed me to explore and fill out the meaning behind my codes; memos written later in the process helped to describe how the codes emerged, changed, and reflected multiple vantage points. Memo-writing was a key step that allowed me to begin making the transition from analyzing data to forming a grounded theory; memos remained strictly internal to the process and were revised and expanded upon later publication (Charmaz, 2006).
CHAPTER V: FINDINGS

In this chapter the main findings are examined and discussed, arranged by four broad themes, in congruence with four main research questions. Within the last two broad themes, a number of sub-themes are identified and set out under sub-headings.

Main Findings

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, the findings are organized by theme in the order of the four main research questions, which, to review, were: 1) What were the challenges that teaching Project of Heart presented to the eleven participants themselves? 2) In doing Project of Heart, what did the participants perceive the challenges were for their students? 3) What were the positive impacts the teacher participants felt Project of Heart had for themselves? 4) What were the positive impacts the teachers perceived the Project had for their students?

As well, sub-themes for the findings associated with questions 3 and 4 are detailed at the outset of the relevant sections.

This section will feature quotations taken directly from the transcripts and modified only by the addition of punctuation. Each of the names is a pseudonym.
To consider the implication of our third question above, was it a transformative experience for participants? Did it encourage an introspective analysis of the nature of power, provoking the teachers to try to understand settler privilege or white supremacy and their own complicity in continuing the oppression of Aboriginal peoples in Canada? What has emerged from the data is that it did not. This too might be expected, as both Kelly and Sandra allude to the fact that it is impossible at the outset to assess the lasting impact of something like Project of Heart. They considered it to be a “seed” that has great potential for change. While it might be unreasonable to expect that a project that can be completed in as few as four days will have so profound an effect as to disrupt the normative discourse and actually “change” people, there were hints that at least for some participants, Project of Heart, to borrow Paulette Regan’s (2010) phrase, began unsettling the settler within.

And while the majority of subjects attest to the potency of the project in strengthening their students’ determination to take action to address the circumstances facing so many Aboriginal people in Canada today, a careful unpacking of the data suggests that the degree to which the students were influenced was associated strongly with the teacher’s own passion for the project. In fact, several of the participants stated that this engagement is something that cannot be mandated by curriculum, but rather is created in the
classroom as the relationship between the teacher and the student/s and the new learning is developing.

Because there were so many “ways in” for teachers to incorporate Project of Heart into their various subjects, and because teachers were entrusted to fulfill the responsibilities requiring that they do all five “parts” of the whole, it was assumed that completion of the project in its entirety would be a typical outcome. However, after conducting the interviews, it became apparent that Part 3 (decorating the tiles) was what the majority of teachers perceived the Project to be. Part 2 (identifying the contributions that the Indigenous people on whose territory the IRS stood, have made or are making to Canada) was only completed by one of the participants, and Part 5 (social justice actions) was done by approximately half the participants.

1. Challenges to teachers

Challenges encountered ran from minor and technical (for example, finding a way to circumvent Board of Education rules regarding “smudging smoke” in the classroom) – to difficult and disconcerting. Dealing with racism in the parent community was one such challenge for some of the participants; for others it was the navigating of school administrations’ understandable concerns that the abuses of the IRS system were “too close to home” for some learners. And sometimes being aware of the possibility that the learner group included intergenerational survivors was a challenge faced by the teacher
alone, with no administration or Board supports.

The background knowledge needed to complete POH is one theme that came through clearly when analyzing some of the barriers to its full implementation. Sandra acknowledges that the most difficult part of doing Project of Heart was Part 1. She states “...in implementation the most difficult part is to spend quality time before you even get to the tiles themselves, to explain to kids truly what residential schools are and were, how they impacted young people, where they began, like they really need to understand that this is not fiction.” Donna has a similar reflection, “I think that in order to do something like this you really have to be well-informed, so I wanted my students to really, I think you have to have a lot of background knowledge before you enter, before you really fully understand what’s happening.”

Because Donna values the “heart-spirit” connection that the students were making through decorating the tiles, she also had a parent volunteer come in to work with the students. “So anyway, she had (the parent volunteer) worked with four students at a time because I wanted them to realize that this was something that we weren’t going to rush at, and I wanted them to really think about what they were putting on the tiles.”

Kelly was unsure of herself at the beginning. “Challenges, again, not knowing perhaps
the extent of the involvement and just kind of going on trust because I was not, I didn’t
have a background, I didn’t know a lot about the, the residential schools.” Kelly also
suggested that it was because she carefully followed the step-by-step process that the
Project was made more challenging, especially because she was so busy in the first place.
“I think, I think inviting someone from the community and scheduling that was, it didn’t
get in the way but it was part of the process. It was good that there were several steps to
it. This year I’m still, that’s still ahead of me making those arrangements. So sometimes
there’s a time lapse between the actual project and then having the smudging.”

Another challenge participants reported was the emotional element. Part 4 of the Project
requires that an Indian Residential School Survivor come to the school to answer
questions about his or her experiences. Donna is clear about her anxiety when she states,
“you’re not supposed to show emotion so that was a concern because I’m an emotional
person and I knew that I would be, so I worried about that.” Randall was equally honest
in his acknowledgement of the difficulty he had trying to stay objective in his delivery of
the IRS story.

...but you know for me it was, to be quite honest for me it was like to restrain
myself from actually like becoming too emotionally involved, you know. And
it’s, it’s, like I said, it’s something that’s very visceral and somatic. You know,
it’s not an intellectual matter. I mean we’re dealing with the souls of people, so, this is like an emotional, visceral matter. This is not an intellectual matter, to me (Randall).

At another point, Randall recalls, “I mean to me it was trying to be as, as objective about the situation as possible, the actual, you know the delivery of the reality of the Residential School system, that was my most difficult, to restrain my tongue, really.”

A specific theme emerging from the data also suggests that some teachers felt they were taking risks by exposing the truth. Telling the truth of the Catholic Church’s involvement in running the Indian Residential Schools was especially significant for one of the teachers who taught at a Catholic school. The town she taught in coincidentally was the home of the group of nuns who ran one of the schools that actually housed an electric chair that was used for disciplinary purposes at the school. Kelly states:

So the fact that in, in the package that came with Project of Heart, wonderful articles, excellent background information, official documents, and first-hand newspaper clippings with first-hand accounts that involved the negative aspects concerning the Catholic Church and the abuse that happened. Again, this is very important to be able to, to bring to the light, I think those things are, are um,
there’s a danger in not speaking about them, but it was difficult in a class (Kelly).

Kelly also iterated, “I teach in a Catholic school, and again, having the difficult conversations is not the safe territory.”

Some participants admitted that they were afraid of how the students would respond or react to the truths being told about Indian Residential Schools. Donna, who believes that teachers are “not supposed to be emotional” talks about how emotionally impacting Part 4 of the project is. “It was very emotional for my kids, like, so I guess that was a concern too.” Randall puts it another way – “and then also to be mindful of the you know, the young people’s responses to it, because we all know that it’s a very emotionally dense and dark subject that, you know, I had to be cognizant of how they would react as well.” Kelly wonders if students might suffer as a result of knowing and learning of the traumatic things that happened to the Aboriginal students at the schools. “...and in fact some students were very resistant and there’s a, there’s that idea of not pedagogically harming someone by bringing them along too quickly to a space where, that they can’t integrate...(Kelly)”

There appeared to be anxieties regarding the steps that needed to be taken to incorporate some traditional Aboriginal protocol into the solidly “mainstream” environment of the
classroom as well. That there might be push-back from community members regarding some of the teaching that was being done or being allowed within the school was something that crossed Donna’s mind.

I worried about how the community would interpret it (the smudging ceremony) because I’m presenting... some people may not agree with the cleansing ceremony and this idea of that acceptance of, of difference, or of other ways of celebrating or recognizing so I worried a little bit about that (Donna).

Even within the school itself, Donna was acutely aware of the incongruence of immersing Aboriginal ceremony within the confines of the mainstream, restrictive “health and safety” conscious school.

And I guess you have to be willing to have all of those you know questions that might be raised, you know some of them might be upset because you’re having a cleansing ceremony with a fire. You know it was a, a big deal just to have it in the school! I mean they didn’t want to have it in the school because they were afraid that the smoke detectors would go off and the fire department would come. Right? You take a risk (Donna).
Another challenge that posed risks for many teachers was an inherent anxiety about their students behaving appropriately both while decorating the wooden tiles as well as while listening to the Survivor talk to the students about what they experienced at the Residential Schools. Randall states:

..like I really wanted it to go smoothly and to be, to respect the children in which the tiles represent, you know, I just wanted to make sure that it was done properly so that was, that was my major point of anxiety I suppose (Randall).

Some of Rodwell’s concerns mirrored those of Randall’s. “...my trepidation I guess was not knowing that they were taking it as seriously as I wanted them to take it.” Thankfully, he had nothing to worry about. “...so when I saw and when it culminated, when I saw it come out in the ceremony, then emotion and how they connected to this, it was, you know, I knew that they got it, but that process was concerning, you know.”

Donna, who had incorporated Project of Heart into her “ARTSMART” grant, was concerned about the artistic integrity of what the students produced. “Ok, this is going to sound really small and petty but I wanted to be really something that was artist – I wanted it to reflect – I wanted it to be, I wanted it to be beautiful, right? So I didn’t want to just, you know, and I wanted to take time, I mean I took time with it. It’s a lot to take
68 students and pull them out four at a time. I mean it took us days, right? Because I, so I worried about, this was representing something and I wanted to represent it well.”

An area where there appeared to be little consistency was in Part 5, the carrying out of the social justice actions. There appeared to be various understandings about what constituted “social justice actions”. Donna, an extremely enthusiastic teacher and keen to pass on her passion for truth and critical thinking to her students, equated social justice with merely teaching the actual facts of our history regarding the Indian Residential Schools. She referred to the phrase “shining the light” on our past history. After numerous questions, it was evident that her ignorance of Indian Residential School history had been so thorough and her new-found knowledge so transforming, that upon discovering there was something that she neglected to teach and do called a “social justice action” (which would address a contemporary justice issue Aboriginal people are experiencing), her equanimity was shaken. The pedagogical purpose of this piece appeared exceedingly problematic.

Like Donna, approximately one-third of the participants didn’t realize that there was a “stand-alone” piece where a social justice action was to be done. The other participants did, or thought that they did. Of that group, Randall was one participant who consciously chose not to do it. He reasoned that if he required his students do this action, it would be
a coercion, and that doing praxis is NOT within his role as a teacher. Randall was adamant and articulated his reasoning at length. While he was not afraid to teach *about* social justice –and supported students taking part in social justice actions outside school time – he would not model it or engage students in it within the classroom.

I just don’t think there should be any compulsion in that. In fact, they need to do that of their own free will. So, it’s my own sort of, I would say philosophical or pedagogical line to be drawn. And I encouraged them, showed them, you know, in terms of how to address politicians politely, but in terms of going forward and actually formally assessing that, I just, that actually made me feel somewhat uncomfortable (Randall).

Randall felt that he could also get into trouble by engaging students in social justice action. “I’m fully aware that that’s you know also like self-preservation on my part as well. Right? Because I mean we’re, we’re monitored in what we do and what we say.”

Other participants also spoke of the risk they felt by having students do social justice actions as the culmination of the Project. For example, Kelly, who taught in a separate (Catholic) school, hinted that the administration in the school would be uncomfortable with teachers doing social justice work with students. She states:
In the Catholic school there are a lot of charity actions done through the religion, but participatory democracy is not something that’s necessarily encouraged and students cannot learn it just by being part of the, what is that new campaign? Learn to vote? Or the ‘Vote Ontario’? There’s a student vote movement, but students are not encouraged in other classes – in other forums – to participate. In fact, I think overall, administration would be quite happy if we veered away from that because it’s a tricky ground. It’s unfortunate – tricky ground meaning (Kelly).”

A challenge that some teachers faced was not knowing what “social justice” was, or knowing how to “do” social justice. For example, Donna appears to equate learning the “true facts” of history (learning the troubling facts about the IRS era, which have typically been omitted from the curriculum) with “social justice”. When interviewing Donna, I re-stated question 5 (What were your feelings about doing the social justice piece at the end of the project?) and 5 a. (Why do you think this piece is/is not important to the project?), a number of different ways, taking up an inordinate amount of interview time. The following exchange demonstrates the lack of understanding/knowledge that Donna had in knowing about the stand-alone part of POH called the “social justice
action”, as well as what “social justice” as a concept IS, and how to engage children in doing it.

Sylvia: Can you just tell me what you, just, this isn’t one of the questions, but *what did your kids do as their social justice piece?*

Donna: Uh, what do you mean?

Sylvia: Did they do, did they do any?

Donna: Oh they did, like, what did THEY do?

Sylvia: Yeah, or like, to, to a, (stuttering) did the the kids, you know, go on to the, let’s say for example the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society web site and sign up for the, as a, on the “I am a Witness” campaign-

Donna: No

Sylvia: - or did they...
Donna: No, no we didn’t. Now we listened to the apology—

Sylvia: Ok

Donna: - and no we didn’t. We did our Haida boxes…

2. Challenges teachers perceived students faced while doing Project of Heart

The majority of teachers remarked on the strong emotional impact that learning about the Indian Residential Schools era had on their students; emotions which ranged from “absolutely shocked and appalled” to “disbelief that something like this could happen in Canada”. Kevin, for example, accompanied students on an exchange to Alberta where many of the students they were visiting had relatives that had spent time in the Sunchild Indian Residential School. Kevin reflects on the students’ shock on hearing their stories:

I remember some students saying, you know, I can’t believe that our Canadian government was responsible for something like this. This isn’t something that you would think, you know, would happen in this country. I remember you know, there was, the students were a little bit shocked about that (Kevin).

Emotional experiences can sometimes make for awkwardness, and perhaps some
embarrassment can be detected in Kevin’s further elaboration: “it got a little bit emotional actually at first because some of the Sunchild students were speaking about their own experiences and their families’ experiences and a few of them were quite candid and it got a little bit emotional in the morning.”

Nicole speaks of the anger her students felt upon learning about the impact the schools had on the students. “They understood the fact that they were taken away from their parents, they could understand the fact that the parents could do nothing about it. And there’s a sense of rage.” Nicole explains that although this betrayal of the truth was difficult for the students to comprehend, it inculcated a desire in them to attest to the reality of this part of Canadian history. “They also wanted to be a witness to the actual fact that this had really happened. They wanted people to see that they knew, because this was something that was so covered up, that they feel anger as well.”

Randall, when assessing the emotional connection that his students were making to the knowledge gained about the impact of the IRS era on Aboriginal children, noted how the connections that the learners made turned to the strongest possible historical example of genocide.

So, I mean the immediate connection when they were (cough) excuse me, when
they were actually knowledgeable of the extent, not only of like the, essentially like the kidnapping of these children but the abuse that they underwent. I mean the students are just absolutely appalled and shocked. So the connection for them was, you know, it’s (cough) excuse me, you know they were comparing it to you know like the Canadian Holocaust is what the students were telling me (Randall).

Kelly acknowledges that some students didn’t want to know the truth about Indian Residential Schools, yet she was uncompromising in her resolve. “I did the Project with my grade 9’s and then with my grade 11’s and 12’s and, in fact, some students were very resistant...Students need to know. They don’t want to know, some of them.” Kelly suggests that perhaps because of the connections to the school’s own community made by some of the news articles included in the POH kit, one of her students could not and would not believe that the abuse happened. She says:

Disconnects with the students when, some of the articles of the survivor’s stories, which are not readily available because they aren’t broadcasted, but there are some in the newspapers. One included a man, remembering of what it was like to have been exposed to a type of discipline that involved an electric chair, and that, this was, it was, it was really a type of torture that was used by nuns. And the nuns were named. They were Grey Sisters in Pembroke, is the centre, is the
motherhouse for the Grey Sisters and that really provided a disconnect of this student. He could not believe that this happened and kept trying to come around it to a different area that this was not an intention, that the intention was a good thing…(Kelly)

Sandra, also a teacher in the Catholic system, admits that one of the challenges facing her students after learning about the Indian Residential Schools, was how to reconcile so much “evil” with so many people who were implicated. She confirms past knowledge by telling her students that not everyone is bad.

And what I tell my kids is that, you know, you can’t paint everybody with the same brush, and that just because one particular group of people, or a person of a particular group participated in something, that doesn’t mean that everybody from that grouping would do the same….it’s not like everyone is intrinsically evil (Sandra).”

Sandra felt that maintaining a positive view of the world could be more challenging for the students after having done Project of Heart.
3. Positive impacts Project of Heart had on the teachers

There were a number of ways teachers found Project of Heart benefitted them directly or indirectly. For ease of reference, I have italicized them at first mention as follows: “Greater Depth of Learning”, “Personal Responsibility to Speak Up”, “Offered Opportunities to Address Injustices”, “Relationship Building with Other Teachers”, “Personal Fulfillment and Professional Growth” and “Importance of Experiential Learning”.

The research indicates that the manner in which teachers were positively affected by the Project appeared to depend not only upon their comfort level with the material they were presenting and the knowledge they had on the topic before beginning, but also on the degree of exposure they previously had to Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people’s experiences of oppression. But all participants reported that participating in the Project led to a much greater depth of learning for the teachers themselves. The extent that teachers reflected upon and grappled with their settler-privilege status – and how much they “put into action” their new and deeper learning – varied considerably.

Maynard conveyed the greater depth of his learning by comparing it to his previous level of knowledge about the impacts of Residential Schools on the survivors.

I mean, even my own learning curve, finding out the degree to which the residential schools had an impact on the community as a while, I had no idea really. I mean obviously I had known about the residential schools and, but really
the overall impact, and how that sort of becomes the root of many of the problems that exist today in the community was quite surprising for me to an extent (Maynard).

The data suggests that most teachers acquired a depth of learning that ranged from fairly objective assertions of “fact” – i.e. Maynard could acknowledge that it is indeed Indigenous people who are the rightful owners of the land on whose territory he lives – to the emotionally-laden acknowledgement that their settler existence and subsequent entitlement was and still is at the expense of Original Peoples. Kelly acknowledges the deep nature of her new knowledge as a result of doing Project of Heart:

I think the, it was part of being proud of the process that I could really admit my own lack of knowledge, and that there was nothing wrong with that, that I was learning with the students and that this ignorance was, it was a deficit but it was not intentional. And there is also a, I think it’s been transformative for me as well because I understand a little more about my, my own background, and the place that I am and what this land – I – don’t – the land that we all belong to, but originally whose land it was is much clearer to me (Kelly).

Kevin admits that even though he was aware of his settler privileges as a young, white
male, he states, “I have a deeper understanding now of how, of just how damaging those Indian Residential Schools were, not just for the people that were taken and put in them, but for whole communities.” He continues:

...but you know, understanding a little more deeply, some of the things that have occurred and that need for reparation that you know, how would you ever repair that type of relationship? You know, it makes me understand a little more deeply (Kevin).

Sandra admitted that she knew little of the gruesome details regarding Indian Residential Schools (deaths, tortures, etc.) and that this learning took place only after she graduated.

...but a lot of the statistics about the physical abuse, the sexual abuse, what happened to a lot of the kids, where they were buried, how many of them were murdered, how many of them literally just lived through a form of hell, was shocking for me...and it was Professor Tim Stanley who first exposed me to residential schools, and I was 26 years old. So I have only known about residential schools for 3 years in my life. Before, I had absolutely no idea. Not in my high school education, not even, I have degrees (Sandra).
Randall confirms the extent of his own new understanding about the IRS experience when he states, “I mean, even my own learning curve, finding out the degree to which the residential schools had an impact on the community as a whole, I had no idea really, I mean obviously I had known about the residential school and, but really the overall impact, and how that sort of becomes the root of many of the problems that exist today in the community was quite surprising for me an extent.”

But while all participants acknowledged the greater depth of learning, the “call” or the compulsion to be a “change-maker” (activist) because of this new knowledge, varied greatly. For example Maynard, who was very candid about Project of Heart not disrupting or intruding on his comfort zone (as a settler) when I queried him about whether or not his identification as a Canadian had been affected said:

I don’t really think so because, I mean, I don’t feel a personal responsibility in terms of what happened, and I’ve already had, I think, a sensitivity to the fact that the impact that European societies have had on the rest of the world and even within Canada, is one that I’ve inherited, but it really hasn’t changed who I am individually (Maynard).

But intriguingly, Maynard appears able to connect his settler status with a personal
...I’m certainly more willing and able I think I’m better equipped to speak out to people about it and when people sort of making disparaging comments about either Aboriginal groups in Canada, or you know issues around the world, then I can speak with more certainty when I address that and say really, there’s, there’s a European responsibility for it (Maynard).

Nicole iterates how Project of Heart presented itself at an opportune time in her personal life and her professional life, after visiting with Aboriginal people in their home territories, and hearing their stories. The timing was right and she found a way to live out her responsibilities through the opportunities Project of Heart offered to address injustices that she was seeing.

So I just thought, you know, I have to, I have to do something about this. This is wrong. So before Project of Hope (sic), for years I, I really thought that and it struck me. I went to Kanawaga, near Oka, and we had a tour of the reserve by an Elder. It was very, very you know Oka had just sort of happened and you know there were some people that were speaking about I guess their whole experience and I just sort of sat there and I went ‘Wow, whoa, we don’t even understand. We
don’t know. We’re not teaching....So I guess since then and then your project came and it was absolutely the right thing to do (Nicole).

Nicole, commenting on the opportunity to “act for justice” that is an explicit component of POH, was forthright about her determination to act as an ally of Indigenous peoples. “And they were not, they didn’t, it was forced on them so that gave me a whole lot more respect for the people and so I said well, you know people have taken their voice away well, I’m going to be part of the group that gives it back.”

Sandra makes a similarly strong observation: “I have three university degrees and it wasn’t until my third degree that someone exposed me to residential schools. And so now I want everybody to know.”

In addition to enabling participants like Nicole and Sandra to address issues of injustice, or bringing Maynard to a greater depth of knowledge, a further quality of POH that had value was the *relationship-building with other teachers* the Project afforded them. For example, Randall discovered that he had more staff wanting to be involved in POH than he needed. “I mean, I just had to present the idea, and then I had, I actually had more people wanting to be involved than I could actually accommodate.”
Another teacher, Helen, who incorporated Project of Heart as her “community outreach” piece in a YMCA exchange program, impressed middle-school teachers at pre-selected sites in the Ajax area. Helen’s (high-school) Native Studies learners were allowed to come into middle-school classrooms to teach Grade 8 students about the Indian Residential Schools. The level of interest and passionate engagement that her ‘teacher-students’ demonstrated during their presentations impressed the educators who had accommodated Helen’s request to allow them access to their classrooms. This was not lost on Helen.

They had no idea what we were going to do. And many of them kind of were doing it as a favour, even though they didn’t know me, it was like ‘yeah, sure, you can have some kids come in our class”, you know…. And then an hour into the presentations and they’re like “this is amazing!” But I had a few teachers who actually you know pulled me aside after about an hour of these two-and-a-half hour lessons and were just like “this is awesome (Helen)!

Perhaps the most positive impact reported by the majority of participants was the personal fulfillment and professional growth they experienced as a result of doing Project of Heart. For example, Donna speaks of the personal growth that she attained throughout the process of integrating Project of Heart into her Artsmart grant.
It taught me a lot about what everyone went through and it made me realize not just me, but you know I’m a better person, like so that is the connections my students made, that’s, and I said it, because Artsmart had a report on this as well, and I said, you know sometimes when you do these things, and I guess you were doing it for us, for teachers, so much of what we do we do to benefit our students but we sometimes forget that it benefits ourselves, so...so what happened to me was I started an Artsmart project and I became, I just I discovered so, I discovered so much about our history. I discovered so much about what works as a teacher. I discovered so much about my students. I discovered about my community. I really realized about the Durham District School Board that I had all of these resources that I wouldn’t have accessed if I hadn’t started it, right? I got, I made contact with Cliff (*an IRS survivor*). You know it was this whole, it was really it was about me, right? I learned, and I grew as a teacher. My kids were why I started it, right? But it was me that – I benefited. I reaped all of this and so I go forward with this enthusiasm, knowledge, and passion. That’s what happened (Donna).

Witnessing the students’ enthusiasm and pro-social engagement in the various steps of Project of Heart affected all the teachers in a positive way. Kelly discovers that one could
not help but be emotionally engaged. “...but I think the way the project was set up in stages it was very powerful. So you could not walk away, and because you’re involved by making those designs and sharing your own, what you imagine would be a lost childhood, I think that you could not remain indifferent, and I think that that’s really the key to the, the impact of the project.”

Randall gives voice to the satisfaction he felt at witnessing the students’ involvement at decorating the small wooden tiles:

Just to actually see them designing the tiles and doing so in earnest, you know, and seeing these young people paying great attention, I mean they’re not artists, but you know, some of them were varying degrees of artistic capacity. But the same like you know, care and attention that they were putting into the tiles because they were very well aware of the fact that these were to represent another child. So to me that was most fulfilling, or most exciting, as you’ve, as you’ve termed it (Randall).”

Rodwell’s response is another testament to the fulfilment that he experienced when he witnessed his students personally investing in decorating the tiles. “…well, the idea of being, just the opportunity to use art in a classroom and it is an artistic project at a certain
level, was exciting to me because I love opportunities to allow students to express themselves that way. They’re very nervous…it’s a different way of approaching something they’re not used to.”

Helen values the professional development capabilities that Project of Heart has afforded her and its impact on her life. “It’s been the most rewarding professional experience I’ve had to date. Ummm. This is exactly why I’m teaching, is to offer these kids this type of experience and to see what kind of impact it’s had on their lives....It’s had a huge impact on my life and on my career I think. These are the kinds of things that I want to keep doing and the Project of Heart presentations were an integral part of that teaching experience for, for all of us.”

Randall was emphatic about the benefits he felt he gained as an educator, especially the confidence he now has to engage in historical truth-telling. Having a sanctioned forum to talk about and discuss Indian Residential Schools was huge for Randall.

I mean I was very honoured to be part of that, and as I said like it was a sanctioned avenue for me to, you know, again to address objective truths. You know like it’s, I’d imagine without that program, I couldn’t have done what I, I mean, just to give you, like to stand up there, for four periods, and try to answer to
the best of my ability, to explain to these students like, why it happened. That would never have happened without the Project of Heart. There would be no way that I would have been given a forum and the students would have been able to discuss that. Absolutely, it would have been out of the question (Randall).

The data also revealed that previously held beliefs teachers had about the importance of experiential learning were validated through participating in Project of Heart. In the both the artistic component (designing and decorating of the tiles and) and in the social justice component, educators note the value of “action” as part of the learning process. For example, Maynard values the social justice aspect of POH because without it, his students may not have experienced going to Parliament Hill for a rally in support of equal funding for First Nations K-12 education. “I don’t know that we would have participated in (the rally) without the sort of connection to Project of Heart. It would have been something that we might have seen, but we wouldn’t necessarily have embraced it as a group to go and do. So the Project of Heart really kind of gets the motivation to actually do that, so that was useful.” Maynard also iterates how learning from an experiential aspect not only gives the students a sense that they’ve made a difference, but that it “cements” the learning.

Project of Heart was a really, from my perspective, a really good way to sort of,
not so much reinforce, but sort of cement, cement the learning, and then the social justice side of it is an opportunity for students to sort of express and make a difference (Maynard).

Randall elaborates on the experiential nature of the project when he states: “And because the residential school system is such an integral part of the course itself, we thought it would be a really good way to sort of acknowledge the importance and give some sort of hands-on, hands-on application to round out the study.”

When Helen was queried with as to whether her teaching beliefs were influenced by her students’ participation in Project of Heart she replied, “I have more of an appreciation for experiential learning. And I always kind of did, but I didn’t know how to implement, I didn’t know how to offer that type of learning.” Affirming the point further, she states, “But it’s, it’s just so important for kids to be able to do as opposed to hear and even see.”

Perhaps the greatest testament to the impact POH’s experiential teaching method has had for educators comes from Sandra’s description of the dramatic manner in which the Project took her teaching away from the standard curriculum’s focus on purely “academic” learning.
They’re completely active. No, no, my kids don’t just think anymore. They DO.
So the social justice piece does that for you. It takes you away from just the, I
don’t want to say just takes you away from the textbook, but it takes you away
from the purely academic curriculum focus and changes the pedagogy. You know
it really flips it. It’s almost like a paradigm shift, because they switch from just a
certain way of learning to a totally different way of learning that quite frankly, in
my opinion, is probably more meaningful (Sandra).

4. Teacher perception of Project of Heart’s impacts on students

In this broad category of data, it was found that the responses crossed back and forth
between two very different means of assessing student growth. First discussed is the
teacher’s employment of traditional western (Euro-centric) measures and descriptors is
observed – the measures that the teacher can readily turn to in assessing and evaluating
because they are in nearly universal use across the school board system in Ontario. Their
basis is in the positivist/empirical scientific method. In order of discussion, here the
sub-themes include “Raising the Bar”, “At-risk Students”, Confidence-building” and
“Anti-bullying Aspect”. The other means of student assessment falls under what I have
termed “heart-spirit/relational learning”. This term will be addressed more fully and the
sub-themes associated with it will be detailed when we come to its section.
“Raising the bar”

One of the unforeseen benefits that some teachers experienced while working through Project of Heart with their learners was genuine enthusiasm – an increase in motivation to learn which “raised the bar” with respect to student performance. Nicole relates one of the reasons why she was drawn to Project of Heart.

I think that attracted me very much because if you have a piece of work that you know will be displayed publicly, you will invest so much more into it....(the completed pieces) would be going to Manitoba and they knew that it would be going to the TRC and because it was going there they invested so much more time and energy in it (Nicole).”

Helen discusses the hard work her students put into teaching other learners about the IRS era through Project of Heart as part of the YMCA exchange trip. These students took on the challenge of not only overcoming their shyness, but also learning the historical content well enough to teach it to an audience of younger students in another school. For Helen, these students were extremely motivated.

I think the students that got it were the ones on the exchange group who were delivering the program to others. It’s one thing to have it fed to you by a teacher
and it’s another thing to have it fed to you and then have to you know, bring it back out in a way that is accessible and appropriate to a younger audience (Helen).

Sandra also speaks to the enthusiasm generated and the “going above and beyond” outcome observed as a result of participating in Project of Heart. In discussing how important she perceives the social justice aspect of the project to be, she pointed to “creating empathy” as one of the outcomes that she observed as a behavioural change in her learners. “My kids now talk to homeless people on a regular basis, and before they would just walk by. They would just walk by and even have a care in the world, and now they stop. And that’s, that’s changed their life.”

*At-risk students*

The data also suggests that Project of Heart was particularly beneficial for students typified as “at risk”. At least half the teachers referred to the positive impact that Project of Heart made with these students. Nicole remarked:

I even had an autistic kid who would not speak. He refused to speak, but he did an incredible, I guess a little movie, on the land claims. Yeah and he did Oka, yeah,
and he did Ipperwash, and he did, what’s the other one? Caledonia, I think, Caledonia, Ipperwash and Oka. Yeah (Nicole).”

At another point in the interview, Nicole also acknowledged that “...some of the weakest students in my class did the best work.”

Confidence-building

It appears that Project of Heart may have acted as a confidence-builder for the “at risk” students by highlighting their strengths. Nicole was eager to tell this anecdote:

...the artwork that came out from the students, that some students who were maybe not you know your brightest shining stars because they’ve had a lot of hardships – but because they were artists, all of a sudden they became admired, where they were never admired. That they were special, like the one boy that I could not stop giving enough tiles to because he would take them home and do them because he got so much recognition, so much, you know, the kids are going ‘that’s beautiful, oh my gosh, you’re such an artist’, and he would come back with even more beautiful pieces everyday. You know, and this is a child who does not have a stable home life. He could relate to those kids, because that was his life. So they touched him, and you know I told him too. I said ‘all those children that
you’re commemorating will always be around you. Their little spirits will always follow you because you did this for them (Nicole).

When asked if there were any parts of the Project that excited her, Sandra, a Native Studies teacher for two years, enthusiastically responded:

I have a particular student who is autistic, and he really got involved with the tiles project, huge! He, it allowed him to showcase his artistic sort of nature, which was great, and in addition to that it was just phenomenal for him, like he really, he just wanted more and more tiles. He was one of our kids who wanted more and more and while he was doing his tiles, he does self-talk, so he talks to himself, and so he was talking to himself about how we need to be nice, we need to be nicer, we need to be better people, we need to help Aboriginal kids, we need to go on a reserve and play games, we need to play hopscotch, we need to...., he was just constantly talking about things that we need to do to make the world a better place. It was pretty powerful. So that’s exciting (Sandra).

For Sandra discovering how some of the marginalized students thrive off this type of learning, augmented the importance of the kind of learning Project of Heart brings about.
And the thing you have to understand, these kids that I teach are considered quote on quote “high risk”. These are the kids who are disengaged, not engaged, and on their own time they went down to Parliament Hill on their March break to participate in this Vigil.

In a similar vein, Donna speaks of how one of her weaker students was inspired to think of how he could make a difference when he got older.

And this is a little guy who is not a strong student and he said, ‘Mrs. XXXX, this makes me want to, I want to run for a place in the government. I want to have a say in how laws are made.

*Anti-bullying aspect*

Nicole also values the anti-bullying aspect that Project of Heart brought out in her school. Aboriginal students who are “at risk” for bullying because they are of First Nations ancestry, found allies in settler students in the classroom. This support and “ally-ship” carried over to the rest of the school. She states:

The students from the territory didn’t really always feel very welcome or comfortable at our school. They were the, I suppose, the minority. So they always
kept everything very quiet, about who they were, where they were from, and they didn’t really look like any different now because there’s a lot of intermarriage, and there’s so many different other people from other places in the world that they just kind of blend in now. But they told me that doing the Project was something that gave them hope because they all of a sudden turned around and saw all their schoolmates fighting on their behalf. That was huge, huuuuuuuuge for them. That they actually saw a whole group of kids jump on the computers to write a letter of opposition to stopping the funding for the, trying to think...the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. They were pretty mad. They sent a whole bunch of letters there and there they, this one girl, I love it, this is this year, she said ‘I’m a proud Aboriginal person’ and I, and, but the fact that she actually outed herself, huge, huuuuuuuuge (Nicole)!

Heart/Spirit or Relational Learning

The second means of assessing POH’s positive impacts as observed on students – and for the purposes of this study, the more useful – resolves into an open-ended set of qualitative descriptors that seek to narrate the outcomes of “heart/spirit or relational learning”. In order of mention, they include “Learning as Therapy”, “Reflecting on their learning”, “Making it real”, “Going Beyond the Curriculum”, “Empowering the
“Students”, “Connecting Students to the Political Process”, “Connecting Students to Prior Experiential Knowledge”, “Real Time, real world”, and “Ripple Effect”.

A schematic breakdown of assessment rubrics in establishing the significance of “heart/spirit” learning in Project of Heart can be found in Appendices A and B. In such an assessment, the teacher cannot readily assign a mark because the learner doesn’t necessarily demonstrate what they’ve learned through traditional measurable outcomes. In fact, it is only the student who truly knows how much they have learned. If the teacher must assign a mark, she or he must necessarily take a subjective approach when attempting to evaluate this type of learning. To be clear, this conceptualization of assessment is not to be taken as a polar opposite of the ubiquitous metrics-based approach. In fact, there is not even a fixed boundary between them. Taken together, they can be thought of as a free-moving discussion from the “conventional” into the “meaning-making of the relational”.

Learning as therapy

The data reveals some teachers believed that Project of Heart contained elements that would help their learners to deal with the emotional impact that often comes with learning about the trauma suffered by IRS students. For these teachers, the artistic component (decorating tiles) and the social justice component both served as conduits where students could channel the strong emotions evoked by their new knowledge.
Nicole summarized it the best in this response.

I think a lot of the students were, I would say empathetic and compassionate...they were pretty shocked. But they were also, the way, because you’re using Project of Heart, you’re actually giving them a way to do something about it. Right? You’re not just letting them hang heavy with all of this emotional baggage. You’re giving them an opportunity to release it through the social justice part of it and also through the artwork. You know it’s art therapy, and it’s also all of this stuff (Nicole).

Kelly amplifies this theme with a powerful description of benefits gained by students engaging in social justice actions after learning about the IRS era.

I think that our children, of this generation, are wounded and need to reconnect, and Aboriginal ways can help that woundedness. And I think the commercialism and the destruction around them is, is in a sense a cry to, for them, wanting to make a difference or being involved in something that is meaningful, and real, and authentic as opposed to what’s kind of constructed by adults for them to, hoops to jump through towards their, so-called hopefully productive lives. Their lives are now, and these issues are now and if they can, if we can connect them in
that present moment, then they will remain connected (Kelly).

Reflecting on their learning

One of the most profound impacts that teachers thought doing Project of Heart had for their students was the “connecting” through reflecting on their learning at a much deeper level. This was especially apparent throughout POH Parts 3 (art) and 4 (survivor teaching).

What became abundantly clear from the data, was that heart/spirit learning was activated. It has been established, notably in research carried out by Aboriginal and anti-oppression scholars (McGowan & Stonechild, 2009; Brendtro, Brokenleg & Van Bockern, 2002; Keith, 2004; Swan, 1998) that in order for a student to learn, she or he must be in a “ready” state. Students’ hearts and spirits must be engaged for optimal learning.

For the purpose of clarity, I will use the explanation of ‘spiritual development’ that is articulated in a publication of the Saskatchewan Instructional Development and Research Unit (McGowan & Stonechild, 2009) titled the More Holistic Assessment for Improved Education Outcomes, page 19, states “The central aim of spiritual development is the
cultivation of inner strength along with the development of an outward focus of care, compassion and respect. The needs of the spirit are recognized as part of the development of whole persons.”

Emotional engagement (heart-spirit learning) is clearly demonstrated during Part 4 of Project of Heart when an Elder or IRS survivor comes to talk to the students. The knowledge such individuals shared – and especially the manner in which they shared it – appeared to create a state of “receptivity” in the students; with it came the compassion and respect McGown & Stonechild (2009) uphold as a central goal of better education outcomes.

The positive outcomes of the Project of Heart Part 4 learning experience would also seem to align with what Palmer (1993) terms a “search for truth” that involves moving beyond the ‘bankruptcy’ of mainstream education. He claims that in far too many instances, curriculae delivered the conventional way, hold little meaning or relevance to many students. However, when the teaching is infused with content that is‘real’ (empirically true or historically accurate) as well as emotionally compelling, then profound learning – learning that has touched children’s hearts/spirits – is the outcome.

The operative words used in this aspect of the research are “connections” or
“meaning-making”. Students are led purposefully and quietly into a place of contemplation and reflection at the end of the Elder’s visit, which is when the smudging of the decorated tiles is over. The students “connect” with or to the Survivor or Elder; it is through their words that the students come to their own meaning-making. The Elder’s wisdom or knowledge helps to guide the learner in the process of integrating truth-telling and bearing witness. Affirming Palmer (1993), the teaching carried out here is demonstrating a way of knowing the world (telling the truth) so that in that by the truth-telling, students can be “re-formed” through opening themselves and paying attention to the “other” (Palmer, p. 108).

When we return to our data with the above in mind, the resonances are not long in coming. For example, Kelly values how the decorating and smudging of the tiles (parts 3 and 4) are connected to thoughtful and deep reflection. She states:

They weren’t just an art project. They were connected to some kind of change, and more than anything, the smudging ceremony. And we did the smudging in the cafetera, and it was, it was just an amazing ceremony. There were about 75 students, and Elder, a drummer, and it was an authentic moment of, of honouring those students that have, those children that were lost in the previous generation and connecting to the future…(Kelly).
Randall echoes Kelly’s sentiments when he says, ”Well, it’s not part of history, it’s like a part of their lives. You know, I mean it will be, forevermore. I mean these are, these are events that students will remember, you know these are events that, you know, students are still talking about.”

Helen speaks of how her students responded to the Survivor when he came to smudge the tiles and do ceremony.

So Cliff told us about some of his experiences in the system, and the kids had a lot of great questions so they were, they were asking a lot. And then he smudged everybody, and you could just see that they were really taking it in. It wasn’t just going through the motions. You know? Because they understand. And they respect. And a lot of them have kind of adopted their own, their own level of spirituality throughout this experience, so it just kind of sealed it for them (Helen).

Helen also speaks of the ‘meaning-making’ through deep and thoughtful reflection that her students experienced.
And you know, a lot of these kids don’t, well they didn’t really consider themselves to be spiritual people and a lot of what we were experiencing made a lot of sense to them (Helen).

Helen continues in a similar vein, when she explains how meaningful the smudging ceremony was to those students who had overcome personal challenges that others had not had to face.

But those who are really going to remember this are those who gave those presentations. And you can see, you know the evidence that I see is when we did the ceremony! And these kids were so overwhelmingly reverent of the whole, of the whole process (Helen).

Maynard also values the students’ active learning through their engagement with the Indian Residential School Survivor.

Christopher Snowboy, he was really really good and the students really, I mean because he, you know, part of his healing journey and all, is through his music and his poetry, the students really sort of saw how he’s emerged from that or is I should say emerging from it and they really, really appreciated it and they were
excited for him to play his guitar and sing songs and he stated that, you know in some ways, you know the suffering and the abuse, or sorry I should say the abuse he suffered at the schools was something that, you know, he has still trouble dealing with…(Maynard).

Randall remarks on the deep learning that the smudging ceremony instilled and the spiritual significance to those who were gathered.

The, I think the one that, I mean other than the actual one, the dedication of the tiles was the smudging by Standing Buffalo Warrior, our local Lakota Elder. I mean that was really where I saw, you know like really sort of like the epicentre of the activity come, come together was in the actual smudging of the tiles and the participation and the students’ participation and the pipe ceremony and you know the actual ceremony itself (Randall).

Randall also values how many students were able to connect to the event and therefore with each other through the smudging ceremony, even though only 200 students out of a possible 1800 were allowed to attend the event.

....I mean it was, it was, was a living experience. You know again like, I don’t
want to use the term but existentially, like it was the epicenter of their experience because it touched them on many ways. The actual, the actual experience of the fire ceremony and smudging is kind of interesting in our school because what had happened...the way that it all unfolded was, was quite interesting because I had to first of all convince the administration to allow the smudging to be part of the school, to be done inside. It took me quite a long time. They’re pretty, I must admit, our Principal is very interested in social justice but of course, you know, logistically, he has to be worried because if the fire marshal shows up, then it’s some, some ridiculous sum. So anyhow then I had to convince him that it wasn’t going to set off the fire alarms, etc. etc. But what had happened was that it was done in our main cafeteria, which is in the, in the, in the middle of the school and unknown to me, the air intake actually starts and finishes in this room! I mean Cliff was very excited about that and so was I because everyone who didn’t participate got knowledgeable about the situation. Cliff was just overjoyed. I was too! Because then it became even broader (Randall).

But the power of the smudging ceremony and the respect given the Elders is nowhere better described than in Rodwell’s reflection. He is almost incredulous as he remembers the seriousness with which the students took the ceremony that the Elder conducted with his students “...he went around and blessed the circle, blessed the individual students
with, with his pipe. And they were, here was not one, none of them was there any hint of discomfort or anything...this is raw humanity, you know? Like this is connecting to something that they didn’t necessarily experience but that they empathize with...and it was incredible to see...

“Making it real”

The data reveals a number of strands that can be organized under the phrase “making it real”, a phrase participants used frequently as they tried to describe their experiences with Project of Heart. This phrase always implied making “heart-spirit” connections as relationships were constantly being forged.

Going beyond the curriculum

My investigation found that many teachers saw the learning that defines Project of Heart as either going beyond the curriculum or as a link between the official and unofficial curriculum and that for these teachers, this is what made the Project such a powerful tool in the classroom. Phrases expressing such “going beyond the officially-sanctioned” came into the data repeatedly as participants described their students engaging emotionally as they progressed through the various stages of the project.

It is apparent that Donna values “making it real” for her students in the way the Project encouraged her take concrete action. So when considering the question, “What would
encourage you to involve yourself and your students in activism in the classroom in the future?” she offers the following: “...and you have to say I’m going to go above and beyond the curriculum and I’m going to DO, you know what I’m saying?” While continuing the discussion on activism, Donna reaffirms her position by stating, “...but you have to open the door and you have to be willing to DO, go beyond you know the textbook and the curriculum and make it real for the kids.” She continues:

Yeah and you know when you, what you really see you know it’s in the curriculum that they, that’s in the history curriculum that they hope they’ll see those issues but if you don’t make a conscious effort, if you must stick to the facts and the dry, bare-bones of the curriculum, are you really going to bring in that social equity and social justice piece? Are you really going to do it? So you have to be willing to open the door and take the time, and value it. That’s what I think.

In answering the same question Maynard evokes the benefit of POH as a “bridge” between differing concepts of curricula “...and again, the good thing about the Project of Heart is that it gives, sort of a link between the curriculum and I guess the unofficial, if you will.”

Without using the terms “official” or “unofficial”, Kelly discovers Project of Heart’s
value in addressing social justice actions *within the classroom* as opposed to a ‘club’ format, where students typically engage in activities on their lunch hour or after school.

...and even being part of a petition, that’s being introduced in a classroom I think is an unusual and unique it doesn’t happen a lot. To be able to, I mean, when I have been involved in social justice at a high school level and it’s usually an add-on and it’s a club, like anything else. There are a few people that get involved and we did an Amnesty action for a political prisoner from years ago, and or different things, water is a, is a commodity, so we’ve done social justice issues but they are not specifically done in the classroom (Kelly).

Kelly feels Project of Heart is “making it real” for the students when it emboldened her to address what she considers a deficit in curriculum. In this case, Kelly is speaking about the official Canadian government apology made to IRS survivors in 2008. She contrasts the immediacy and usefulness of the apology as a teachable moment with her typification of official curriculum as “this curriculum in the sky”:

In my class, when I had, when Stephen Harper apologized for the residential school system and I was able to show that, before YouTube was actually censored in our school board, I showed it to every group of students that came into my
class that day. No one else had spoken about it. So, and it’s not an intentional neglect. It’s just a lack and a, a deficit in our teaching that we are, are trying to stick to this curriculum in the sky without looking at what’s under our feet. So (Kelly).

**Empowering the students**

The aspect of “making it real” for the students and “going beyond the curriculum” can be described as empowering the students. Before we examine the data referencing this theme, we will briefly discuss the meaning of the “social justice component” within the framework of POH.

Learners in this phase develop an understanding that it was Canadian government policy that created Indian Residential Schools, and that it is Canadian government policy that continues to carry out an assimilative agenda (i.e. First Nations children in child welfare). As well, older students are exposed to the claim that Canada’s actions, both in the past and in the present, may be described as genocidal (i.e. the epidemic level of violence against Aboriginal women) toward Indigenous people in Canada (Alfred, 2009; Smith, 2009). Students working through this final section of Project of Heart choose an injustice they want to learn more about, and then carry out the “social justice action” referred to in the previous paragraph. Engaging the students in “praxis” (reflection and action together)
completes Part 5. “Walking the talk” of truth and reconciliation is at its core. Part 5, if done routinely and en masse, approaches what Taiaiake Alfred calls “restitution”: what settlers must engage in before reconciliation can become a reality (Alfred, 2009). For students, becoming educated about the true facts of their relationship with Indigenous peoples in Canada – accepting the historical reality for what it is – increases the possibility of meaningful discussion on true reconciliation. Working through the social justice action builds a relationship of trust, ultimately proving that the assertion “I’m sorry” is genuine.

In bearing the above in mind as we return to our data, we see strong indications that teachers who understood and completed the social justice part of POH felt that it empowered students.

It did so by:

- *connecting students to the political process*, and in so doing, proving to the students that their contributions have the power to effect positive change.

Nicole, an enthusiastic participant and ardent proponent of Project of Heart, was featured along with her students in the 2011 CBC documentary “8th Fire”. She relates how she
understands her students to be integrating the knowledge they acquire through participating in the Project.

And so, also, the whole experience taught the students that the nation-building is not done! We’re not done here in Canada. That’s the hugest (sic) lesson that students took away from this, was we have more work to do! We’re not done! And I think that too does away with the while, you know we talk about the thing that students are apathetic, and you know that they don’t vote, they don’t do this, and I really think it’s all because they think that it’s all done. ‘What do we need to do?’ ‘We don’t have to do anything. Everyone did everything for us in the past.’ And by bringing these subject up that are yes, very uncomfortable, and horrible, it teaches, it also says, ‘Well, you know what? Maybe we need to look at Aboriginal people that are not doing very well in a whole different light (Nicole).”

“Making it real” in this context is seen as connecting students to the political process and in so doing, going so far as to problematize the nation-building of the Canadian state. Nicole’s classroom is a site where the popular trope of teens as inherently “uninterested in the political process” or as “lazy and unmotivated” is shown up for the myth that it is.

Nicole also understands and is excited by the way her students responded to harnessing
the power students have to effect change.

You’re doing the tiles and now let’s put some of the social action outrage into action to do something because it teaches students that they can have an impact on government today. Right? So we sent our little letter to Prime Minister Harper who did not agree with what we had to say but it didn’t matter because Prime Minister Harper sent a letter back saying that “I GOT THE LETTER” and that in itself was a huge lesson. That you don’t have to be 18 to make a difference in this world (Nicole).

Sandra talks about her students empowerment through the “doing” aspect of Project of Heart and being politically pro-active, which carried over to other aspects of their lives.

They can recognize that...they can say ‘Hey! That’s not ok. And I learned that I matter, I learned, I know that I matter and I know that I’m important and I know what I want makes, matters too. And so I can stand up for myself on my own two feet and can say that this is not ok and my voice is going to make a difference (Sandra).
Sandra supplies compelling evidence for how the “making it real” – empowering students by connecting them to the political process – has been fundamental to her students’ learning. When asked if she was surprised by any of the student opinions raised after completion of the project, she has this powerful reflection:

I haven’t been surprised. I have been brought to tears several thousand times. It’s hard. My kids have written tonnes of reflections, they have written “I am a Witness” reflections, they just wrote letters the lawyer who took on the appeal for the tribunal pro-bono, thanking the lawyer for doing that and trying to give him some more backbone and feedback...but they’re trying to use their voice. They say, “Miss, you know we want our voices to be heard and we don’t think that all Aboriginal kids are having the right to have their voices heard so we want to use our voices to represent those kids who don’t have a chance to be here, who don’t have a choice to say what’s on their heart or on their mind, so we’re going to use our voices, and we’re going to use our writing and we’re going to use, you know the tools that we have that, you know, are at our disposal to make a change (Sandra).

Sandra continues to speak of how her students responded to the invitation to action:
So they’re partially thank-you letters, reflections, partially like – ‘hey buddy, you know this is what you need to know. Aboriginal kids are kids too and we’re sick of hearing’ – that’s probably some of the most powerful, is my kids that are stepping up and saying you know this is, this is sickening. How come here we are in 2011, and racism and discrimination and all of these disgusting things that we think only happened, you know, hundreds of years ago still exist right now? This is not ok. Why does Canada think this is ok? This is not right. And so they’re stepping up to the plate. And so for me, it’s been an emotional journey. They’re good tears (Sandra).

Brian, the Aboriginal Programming Officer for the school board that the majority of participants are from, adds a valuable point of view as he describes the way the Project connects its learners with the political process. Brian was instrumental in transporting an IRS survivor to multiple schools in his district to help them with Part 4 (witnessing to the lived experiential knowledge of a survivor or cultural worker), and was therefore able to witness first-hand, in many classrooms, how meaningful the survivor’s knowledge was, and how important “making it real” was for both the survivor and the students. Brian used this realization (how the Elder’s teachings could lead to evoking an action-oriented, collective student response) in addressing his own remarks to the class. ‘What does the government need to do?’ I said. ‘What’s missing in this? Is there reconciliation in what
the government says? Are they asking for forgiveness? Are the people ready to forgive the government? Is there reconciliation at this point?’ So we took it from that ‘me to we’ on a national level (Brian).”

- Connecting to prior experiential knowledge

Another aspect of “making it real” is connecting the students’ learning by relating it to their own lives and what they “know”. There are a number of connections that participants spoke of, many of which were unanticipated. Often it was the power of direct comparison that was especially affecting. For instance, when research participant Rodwell talks about his students addressing ongoing injustices through joining in campaigns carried out by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, he says, “...the best way I find to initiate learning is to compare it to what they’re most familiar with, and that’s the education system”. Rather than speak of “government policies” or “funding formulas”, or similar phrases which are typically understood at the cerebral level only, Donna values the Project’s focus on the lives of other young people “See, that’s exactly my students and I think because they recognize, because they’re children, right? Because it’s something they can really relate to because they can’t imagine that happening to them, right?” Donna is also able to iterate the profound emotional connection that a student’s mom made when the IRS survivor came to talk to the
students. She says:

So I brought her, and I invited them (the family members) to come as well. Well she has her grandfather, great grandfather had come, was Aboriginal. He had come from the States, which I didn’t know this and she had told me as we’re sort of part of this ceremony she said to me after, she said my Grandfather was adopted. He was from the States. He came up, there’s an Aboriginal connection there, and he came up. She, she was so emo-, she cried through it, so the emotion, right it’s very emotional (Donna).

This experience could not have been predicted (and certainly not all participants were lucky enough to have family members present during Part 4), but Kelly talks about how empowerment can happen even in Part 3 (decoration of tiles) by connecting students’ learning through relating it to their own lives.

I think it was very transformative to be involved in a hands-on activity that not only expressed and represented each child that was lost in that system, each identity, but then to connect to the students’ own childhoods and what would be lost, to put it out there on a tile…(Kelly).
Sandra values the capacity that Part 5 (social justice action) holds for connecting the students’ learning and relating it meaningfully to their lives.

...it’s one thing to read through the text, it’s one thing to participate in the tiles, but to really make it real, to really make it concrete, to give the kids an opportunity to actually make that change we’re talking about, they participate in the social justice piece (Sandra).

Randall discusses his students’ strengthened ability to connect their learning to “real world situations” they face as Canadian citizens:

I mean in terms of the connections they could see that you know this was an issue that was still, residuals were still present in their own history. I mean because to them it started conversations about you know like the, the unceded or crown lands, and land issue claims, and educational, you know crises within the First Nations community. So they really saw it as really being like part if a situation in which they’re, they’re still a part of in terms of being citizens of Canada (Randall).
“Real time, real world”

A third aspect of making it real for students can be encapsulated by the phrase 3) “engaging in real time with the real world” and seeing the past as present through the lens of social justice. In Part 5 of Project of Heart, through connecting the past to the present, students are expected to conduct themselves as contributing citizens whose actions matter. These actions are even viewed by some participants as “healing” in terms of the effect that they have on the students. Kelly acknowledges benefits that making the curriculum “real” for the students can have.

I think that our children, of this generation, are wounded and need to re-connect, and Aboriginal ways can help that woundedness. And I think the commercialism and the destruction around them is, is in a sense a cry to, for them, wanting to make a difference or being involved in something that is meaningful, and real, and authentic as opposed to what’s kind of constructed by adults for them to, hoops to jump through towards their, so-called hopefully productive lives. Their lives are now, and these issues are now and if they can, if we can connect them in that present moment, then they will remain connected (Kelly).

When asked to consider her own thoughts about the value of the social justice piece as an ending to the Project Nicole states, “…to be honest I think it’s crucial. It’s very important
to do that part because it shows students how to be able to bring it back to today.”

Elaborating on students’ engagement, Nicole says “You’re doing the tiles and now let’s put some of the social action outrage into action to do something because it teaches students that they can have an impact on government today. Right?” Sandra was blunt when it was her turn to consider the importance of the final part of the Project. She says, “So you have to do the social justice piece, you just must.” Connecting with the real world, bringing what the students are learning to life, is essential:

The social justice piece makes it real, it makes it relatable, it makes it authentic, it gives them an opportunity to actually make a difference and they feel good that they’re making a difference and it inspires them to do other things on their own (Nicole).

Even for participants who did not do Part 5, the students’ engagement with the “here and now” regarding First Nations, Métis and Inuit issues was seen as very important. Randall was asked about what part or parts of the Project made him feel as though “connections” were being made:

I mean in terms of the connections they could see that you know this was an issue that was still, residuals were still present in their own history I mean because to
them it started conversations about you know like the, the unceded or crown lands, and land claims issues, and educational, you know crises within the First Nations community. So they really saw it as really being like part of a situation in which they’re, they’re still a part of in terms of being citizens of Canada (Randall).

Rodwell, another research participant who claims he was not aware of the social justice component of the Project, still affirms that connecting the past with the present and teaching the students how to be contributing citizens is vital:

Yeah, it’s shameful, and the more citizens that know and grow up with the knowledge, so that this isn’t something that you’re learning as an adult if you happen to read an article in McLean’s magazine or something, this is something that you’re getting in school. This is something that you pass on to your children and their children (Rodwell).

In fact, Rodwell states that it’s the teacher’s job to make the students aware of the importance of active citizenry. “Well, that’s the job is to get them thinking about how they can be contributing citizens you know, more than anything else. And this is a part of it.” When asked if he would be reticent to do social justice actions with his students, he said he would not.
...it’s powerful too because, no, I’d never be afraid of doing something like that, when they get letters back or emails back from people in government saying we’ve, even if it’s a form letter, ‘we acknowledge your concern here’, you know this is, this is giving them an opportunity to experience being an active citizen, right (Rodwell)?

Nicole was adamant about the value of teaching for social justice in the classroom. She queries, “What is the point of it really? So you can know all this stuff? No! You’ve got to be able to use it and the way you use it is to be socially active, that’s how.” Nicole’s strong belief in having students doing social justice actions based on the knowledge that they have accrued can be summed up with her comment, “I think that we, what’s the point in teaching history if that’s not what you’re going to do with it (Nicole)?”

*Ripple Effect*

Another theme that runs through the conversations with participants is the “ripple effect” that happens when “making it real” has taken place. For example, Kelly realized that when her students were doing the various social justice actions, that this led to other connections being made with the Aboriginal community.

This was a part that I found particularly important and it had a ripple effect. So
that when we did the petition on the Stolen Sisters the first time, the second time we had this petition as well as a local petition concerning a dam, so it’s an environmental action. A local dam that’s being constructed in Petawawa, on Kitchisipperini territory, Algonquin territory, but another Elder came and spoke to my grade 11’s and the grade 9’s last semester and that was also an important piece. So, yeah, very important (Kelly).

Brian speaks in an almost philosophic manner about how the Project connects everyone with each other in a “real” way. Here’s how he responds when asked what it was in particular that made him feel as though connections were being made between the students and the material:

It’s, it’s, it talks about the pebble in the pond and the ripples. It’s the rippling, and just how that is. It’s not just one person – not one class. In so many cases it’s rippled out across the school. Yes, we’ve completed thousands of tiles but it’s probably affected tens of thousands of kids. Like that is amazing. When I think of that, that’s REALLY amazing. like it wouldn’t have happened otherwise! That whole information, knowledge about Indian Residential Schools, and the ability to respond to it in a meaningful way is such a powerful combination (Brian).
Randall speaks of how his students’ learning about the IRS era (through POH) has impacted other students in other teachers’ classes who could and should be learning this history, but aren’t. Randall’s students’ participation is “making it real” because it has highlighted the deficit in their school when it comes to learning about the history and legacy of the IRS.

But they, they’ve also, I mean in terms of their opinions, they’re now asking, and this has become not a, not an issue, but why, you know like in terms of history courses being taught or geography courses being taught as, why are they not being taught these issues in those respective courses? So, it’s kind of set a sort of ripple effect throughout the school (Randall).

**Summary of Findings**

In keeping with the purpose of the study, which is to find out if Project of Heart led to transformation, as demonstrated through disrupting the status quo (“common sense” behaviours) of teachers and students, the findings were loosely organized under four main but interrelated headings: challenges to the participants themselves, challenges teachers perceived students faced while doing Project of Heart, positive impacts Project of Heart had on teachers, and teachers’ perceptions of Project of Heart’s positive impact of students.
Among the positive impacts that Project of Heart had on the students, it was the affective component, including specific elements such as relationship-building and relationship-making, that mattered most to the teachers. This was evidenced by the amount of interview time they spent discussing such impacts. Here it will be helpful to recall the range of positive impacts detailed by category and subcategory in this paper’s table of contents. “Heart/Spirit Learning” or “Relational Learning” includes the following three subgroups: “Learning as Therapy”, “Reflecting on Their Learning”, and “Making it Real”. In the latter category, there are four subgroupings: “Going Beyond the Curriculum”, “Empowering the Students”, “Real Time Real World”, and “Ripple Effect”.

“Going beyond the Curriculum” was a category referenced particularly frequently in the findings, and it was therefore worth considering why this may be so. In may be related to a common feeling held by many educators of just how little historically accurate content the curriculum they were expected to teach actually contained. As well as the deficit in Ministry-approved texts regarding the historical mistreatment of Indigenous people – statistics and basic truths about the colonial settler state – nowhere in the curriculum was there material, or information, or resources that students could learn from and relate to elicit a personal response or that would strike an emotional chord. With only 67 words dedicated to talking about Indian Residential Schools in the recommended Grade 10
Canadian History textbook, it would appear that, in contrast, the POH learning module threw the paucity of “official” information into stark relief.

When the teachers used the phrase “making it real”, it was often associated with evidence about students and teachers involving themselves with each other in new ways, and involving themselves with the community outside the classroom. For example, in Part 4 teachers invited IRS Survivors, many of whom were also Elders, into the classes. They were invited to talk to about what life was like for them in the Indian Residential Schools and what impacts these schools had on them and their families. These invitees were members of the community whom students would typically never recognize as “teachers”. One Elder made a living as a construction worker. Some Survivors had never experienced salaried employment as mainstream Canadians might understand it, but when invited into the school to talk, they were all “teachers”. Their presence and their methodology (some of the Survivors were also traditional knowledge holders) were able to disrupt both students and teachers’ common sense notions of what “teachers” were.

Many aspects of the Project encouraged this type of cognitive dissonance, and in various ways and capacities, ultimately led the learners “into crisis” (Kumashiro; 2000, 2002, 2007). For those teachers that completed step two of POH, similar outcomes were observed. Participants confronted their own stereotypes and biases when, for example, it
came as a surprise to them when they learned, through POH, that there were Indigenous persons serving as elected officials in various Canadian legislative assemblies. In many cases, the only place the learners had ever seen Aboriginal people (or at least people they “knew” to be Aboriginal) were the streets. The fact that there were many Indigenous people who have been contributing to Canadian society since contact and continue to do in varying aspects of life, came as a surprise to many. An aspect of their world-view was therefore disrupted, a necessary change in order for them be capable of making change (Kumashiro, 2000).

“Going beyond the curriculum” was also observed in the manner in which some learners were led to “stuckness”, or an entrenched resistance (Kumashiro, 2000) to the new knowledge, for example, the denial one student demonstrated when shown evidence that leaders in his church were complicit in crimes against children.
CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

*Parts of Project of Heart Actually Completed*

Eight of the ten teacher-participants in the study acknowledged that they did *not* do Part 2 (researching the contributions to Canada of the Original Peoples of the territories on which the IRS stood) and five of the ten teacher-participants did not do Part 5 (social justice actions).

The non-completion of certain sections of the Project is perhaps understandable as the natural result of the module is reliance on teachers’ own personalities, preferences, and comfort levels. Trusting to the individual approach of each teacher was necessary due to the fact that Indian Residential Schools were not even “on the radar” of the Ontario Ministry of Education’s curriculum and were unmentioned anywhere in the syllabus. As was mentioned in the review of the literature, the main Canadian History text in use in Ontario high school classrooms had exactly 67 words to spare on the topic. Adding to the Project’s dependance on the individual educator was the fact that it was new, so there was no predetermined “way” to do it. There was nothing like a trained “Project of Heart Implementation Officer” accessible to them.

To execute Project of Heart according to its own guidelines, each teacher would have had to read the instructions very carefully (even after having gone through the in-servicing) and would have also had to familiarize themselves thoroughly as to the objectives the
Project. While the non-prescriptive approach allowed maximum flexibility for the teacher to enter the Project wherever it would fit best into their subject area, it also left the onus on the teachers themselves to know what needed to be accomplished and to realize that accomplishment. They were completely reliant on their own diligence to stay “true” to the Project’s purpose.

The data revealed that for most participants the Project consisted of three discrete parts, rather than five. All recalled Part 1 (learning about the IRSs and their impact on the children and their families), Part 3 (decorating the tiles), and Part 4 (Elder/Survivor speaking to students). All teachers completed Part 1, Part 3 and Part 4. All ten teacher-participants either taught Native Studies, History, Art (Native Art), or English (Aboriginal Voices).

Only two of the participants actually taught every component of the project. A further three teachers believed they had covered all the parts, when in reality, the data shows they actually missed doing at least two of the parts.

*Embracing Contradictions: difficulties for the teachers*

The first challenge participants experienced appeared to stem from the *inadequacy of training alone* to prepare someone to teach about something as outside their realm of
knowledge and experience as Indian Residential Schools. Because Project of Heart is made up of five parts, each part comprising an aspect that is fundamental to a holistic learning experience, it requires adequate time, thoughtful reflection, and a measure of confidence. Deficits in these factors could be observed, for example, when teachers admitted to neglecting certain sections because they were unclear as to the learning objectives, or felt they might be incapable of eliciting the outcome they believed *should* be attained.

A second challenge that participants experienced was that the subject matter was emotionally draining. Most knew very little about this aspect of Canadian history, and therefore were completely “blindsided” about the horrific mortality rate in the Residential Schools. Some considered that exposing these truths to their own students was risky. Some were afraid of how the students would respond or how the families of the students would respond. This fear could be manifested whether the students were Indigenous or whether they were of settler background. Some participants felt an emotional drain not because of the fear of how students and/or their families would react, but because of the “political” nature of the social justice section (Part 5) and not wishing to “get into trouble”. Another emotionally charged aspect of the Project that was observed with many participants was the anxiety around teaching the “hard to digest” facts about the Indian Residential School era. As the students were learning about the realities of the inmates at
these schools, participants spoke of the potential for these facts to trigger strong emotional responses from their learners. In fact, some teachers reported intense student anger, to the point where some felt that it might be difficult for the young people to maintain a positive view of the world. This anger could be witnessed as coming from two entirely differing perspectives; from youth not wanting to believe Canada could have allowed this or that the clergy could be implicated in such heinous acts, to those who ‘believed’ what they were learning but were lost in a cognitive dissonance as they tried to digest how something as important and as impacting as this could be kept hidden from them for so long.

A third and further difficulty was that some participants simply did not know how to do a social justice action. Even though examples were given in the resources kit that were sent to them – and were posted on the POH website for them to refer to – some participants still did not understand what was meant by “social justice action” and therefore left that part out, or mistakenly thought they had somehow covered it in a previous activity. The most glaring misunderstanding was demonstrated by one participant who could list a number of actions that her school had done, but they were all examples of raising funds or collecting classroom supplies for Indigenous communities. She was unable to distinguish between charity and social justice. However, against such an anecdote, POH’s insistence on the value of social justice actions in “making learning real” appeared to be
very beneficial for those teachers who understood what they were, and knew how and when to engage their students with them. These participants seemed to realize that doing the social justice actions within the classroom clearly set POH’s learning objectives apart from the vast majority of Ministry-approved curricula.

**Unforeseen Connections: “Heart-Spirit” Relational Learning**

A close reading of the data reveals a number of themes concerning “heart-spirit” (relational and meaning-making) learning for the students. In fact, there were eight “relational/connecting” themes that emerged from this process. The first was that the learning students accomplished through doing Project of Heart connected them with their teachers. At some point in the interview, most participants volunteered that because they themselves were very “new” to this topic, they felt as though they were learning in collaboration with their students. Sandra acknowledged that because of the disturbing content of the material being learned, it was an “emotional journey” for both herself and her students and that she was overjoyed at the enthusiasm for taking social action that her students demonstrated. “Like, this is them, so they take on the project. It makes it meaningful to them and it becomes theirs. And it’s not me teaching them, it’s them teaching me!” While Rodwell spoke of the cooperative nature of the learning, he also talked about the collegial interactions between the students and the teachers. “...How we understand our relationship with a place. It’s new to them, and I explained to them, that
it’s new to me as well. Like I’m learning as we go also, so we’re learning together here. And so that forms a common ground because it’s like something that’s hi – it’s an obvious thing that’s hiding in plain sight” (p. 36). Helen’s commented “Yeah, it was very much a kind of symbiotic relationship, you know they, they were as much contributing as they were taking,” when looking to describe how her role became more of a facilitator than a teacher as her students began to take on leadership roles within the Project. The teacher-student relationship was positively influenced from Randall’s point of view, in that that he felt he was being sought out for advice. He states, “…it is an honour and a privilege to be able to be like, the person that is able to at least, you know, point them in the right direction in which they choose to follow.”

The second “meaning-making” (heart-spirit) connection was the connection that students made with their classmates. It often emerged that in the process of doing Project of Heart, positive relationships between and amongst students were built. As we was noted in a previous chapter, teachers observed that Aboriginal students were finding settler allies through Project of Heart. This point bears emphasis. As witnessed by Nicole, the solidarity between classmates as they confronted racism and ignorance from the greater student population was anti-racism and anti-oppression education in action. In one notable case, a Durham school received funding to send students on an exchange to a First Nations school in Alberta as part of POH. Kevin highlighted the resulting personal
connections made with the Aboriginal students as “what really made it (POH) extra meaningful.” Sandra values the community-building in the classroom that Project of Heart elicits. She recommends that all Native Studies teachers actually begin their course by teaching Project of Heart “because if you do that you’re going to build capacity… and that sets the tone for the rest of the year. The kids buy into the course and they approach it with a new sense of empathy and understanding and caring and concern for everyone. And that’s the best thing I could ask for.” Some of the participants appeared pleasantly surprised when they saw collaborations and associations made in the classroom that they hadn’t seen before. Other participants were not at all surprised at witnessing alliances and protective gestures emerge because they felt that the issues being discussed nurtured students’ humanity and their sense of what was right. Holding vulnerabilities “out there” appeared to bring students together in ways that teachers hadn’t experienced before.

The third relationship-making “heart-spirit” connection that emerged was the connection that students and teachers were able to make with their wider community. For example, Sandra iterated that her students, through participating in the social justice actions, were able to meet supporters of families of women who had gone missing or had been murdered when they went to Parliament Hill for the vigil. She also spoke of students who weren’t “afraid” anymore to talk to homeless people in the street. Helen spoke of the new connection that her school made, through Project of Heart, with their local YMCA, who
requested mementos, photos, etc. of Kelly’s students being involved with the Aboriginal students from the Sunchild reserve in Alberta. Brian spoke at length about teaching the entire body of school board support staff about the Indian Residential Schools. Such an initiative was not within Brian’s mandate as the Aboriginal Liaison with his Board, but he saw an opportunity to make more connections, and found that these employees displayed an eagerness to learn about a history they too had been taught nothing about, and for him this was truly inspiring. Debra recalled a student’s father who happened to be a full-time firefighter, yet he was so engaged in what his child was learning that he volunteered to take 300 tiles and inscribe information about the IRS era on the back of each one. In a number of instances, participants spoke of family members of students coming to the school when the Elder/IRS Survivor was in attendance. Sometimes someone from a neighbouring First Nation would hear of the new teaching going on at the school, and would ask if they could be present to hear the speaker and witness the smudging of the tiles. In these circumstances, new relationships were made as the Indigenous community made their presence known. Teachers iterated that they knew this was important and it made them feel not just energized, but committed to continue doing this work because it was transformative.

The fourth relationship of “heart-spirit” nature was of the connecting of the students and their history. This became particularly relevant when students were doing the social
justice part (Part 5). Teachers confirmed that as students learned more about the history that had been previously omitted from their courses of study, they also became aware that similar injustices were still being encountered by Indigenous people, and that trauma continued to be lived and relived.

The fifth relationship of “heart-spirit” nature was of that of the teachers recognizing students’ connections with Aboriginal peers. A consistent theme that presented itself in the findings was that through the Project’s centering of Indigenous (peripheralized) knowledges, the learning space was made safe for students with Aboriginal backgrounds to share the facts of their Indigeneity, in a reversal of the “invisibilization” processes of present-day assimilation. For mainstream students, teachers reported that the revelation that their fellow students had Indigenous backgrounds was often a consciousness-raising experience.

A sixth relational “heart-spirit” connection the data revealed teacher participants making of their students was the students’ new relation to the political process and the belief they developed in their power to effect change in the world (civic engagement). For the teachers who understood the importance of trust-building to the process of reconciliation this was a very meaningful connection, and one that they perceived could be life-changing for many of their learners. As Nicole iterated, it is the “doing something”
that empowers the learner. In taking action, students realize they are not limited to passively ingesting an unjust history; rather, they can “make” history by involving themselves in it. The “doing” helps to channel the anger that was expressed by many learners when they felt that they’d been “duped” by the received historical narrative, and validated their strong emotions in a manner that can lead to positive outcomes. For some of the teachers, it was watching their students engaging in a collective effort to right a wrong that made Project of Heart so gratifying. As one teacher said, the students realized that they were a part of something much bigger and that they (the students) were part of making Canada ‘more complete’ by working to support justice and fairness for Indigenous people.

The seventh “heart-spirit” relational aspect of meaning-making was the connecting of the students to their natural environment. Some teachers reported that once their students learned how to be involved in social justice issues concerning Aboriginal peoples, it led to action on other types of justice issues. As just one example, Sandra’s students got involved in Earth Day (April 22nd). Having taken part in several social justice actions as part of Project of Heart, and they now saw how they could make a difference in ways that benefitted environmental causes. Because there were so many possible campaigns for students to join in support of Indigenous people – and because so many of the struggles of Indigenous peoples are concerned with protecting the environment – students often
realized that action in support of environmental causes was a way to act as allies of Indigenous peoples.

The eighth “heart-spirit” connecting that evidenced itself was the students’ accessing the emotional/spiritual part of themselves. “The central aim of spiritual development is the cultivation of inner strength along with the development of an outward focus of care, compassion and respect. The needs of the spirit are recognized as part of the development of whole persons,” (McGowan & Stonechild, 2009). Such an observation is congruent with many of the participants’ explanations of why they felt Project of Heart was such an empowering learning tool. It appears that through a) creating the gestures of reconciliation (POH Part 3); b) experiencing the IRS Survivor’s visit (POH Part 4) and c), carrying out the social justice actions (POH Part 5) that students were able to, per McGowan and Stonechild, “cultivate the inner strength” and manifest compassion and respect. As an example, Helen recounted an encounter that took place after students returned from their trip to Alberta (which saw them attend a First Nations school and live with Indigenous families) and they began to facilitate Project of Heart with other students in the school board.

So Cliff (the Survivor) told us about some of his experiences in the system, and the kids had a lot of great questions so they were, they were asking a lot. And then he smudged everybody, and you could just see that they were really taking it in. It
wasn’t just going through the motions. You know? Because they understand. And they respect. And a lot of them have kind of adopted their own, their own level of spirituality throughout this experience, so so it just kind of sealed it for them.

When asked about evaluating or assessing the students on how much they’d learned, Helen’s response was:

How can you put a mark on how a kid feels? You know? If I, if I could measure it in tears, then all the kids are going to get 100% throughout this experience. Ummmmmm. If I can measure it by body language during the ceremony when Cliff was speaking and the kids were, you know listening with their ears as well as their eyes as well as their bodies as well as their hearts and you could just see. You know not just my exchange kids but also the Native Studies kids how, how respectful and how much they were absorbing.

Brian also talked about how his experiences with some of the teachers’ classes were indicative of the way students were impacted by the Survivor’s visit. “And that was a motivator because everyone had the chance to see Cliff. They know the power of what he’s able to do, and how it contributes to the whole project, and so it was really important for people and students experience that.” Nicole also talked about students’ emotional
investment when they were decorating the tiles. “And they wanted to honour every child that did not survive the experience, and this was a perfect way to take all of that emotional compassion and empathy that they had, to put it down onto something that would then have a destination.”

Drawing on the evidence, it would appear that one of the strongest unintended benefits of POH was the affective component of the learning and how that strong emotional engagement drove their action-oriented responses (the artwork and the social justice actions). The decoration of the tiles appeared to be especially powerful for the teachers trained in art pedagogy and methodology. Kelly stated “…you could not walk away, and because you’re involved by making those designs and sharing your own, what you imagine would be a lost childhood, I think that you could not remain indifferent, and I think that that’s really the key to the, the impact of the project.” Nicole believed that it was in the action of creating the artistic designs and in enacting their civic responsibilities via the social justice piece that students realized they themselves could make history through involving themselves in it.

*Addressing research questions*

Employing our questions as a means of looking at the data itself, some observations can
be made as to how the participants’ received notion of Canada as a benevolent nation was challenged by exposure to the Project. For example, in fearing for students (or the families of the students’) reactions to the emotional nature of the new learning, was it possible that the some of the teachers themselves were feeling somewhat ashamed? War is also a visceral and emotive subject, yet history teachers rarely have qualms about teaching it. In fact much of what is taught as history is actually teaching about bloody conflict. The Holocaust itself is a mandatory topic as early as Grade 5 in Ontario. When Survivors were brought into the classroom to speak of the trauma they experienced in the classrooms of their childhood and the teachers almost universally remarked on the rapt attention given them by their students, were they not contrasting it with the learning typically mandated by the official curriculum? And when their (conscious or unconscious) reluctance to engage in Part 5 – the social justice action – was manifested again and again, whose worldview was left unchallenged? The students, or the teachers whose pedagogy was not yet ready to challenge the status quo?

Conclusion: Implications for the author

The process of reflecting on my data and considering its implications over a period of time led me to consider posing the “additional” question mentioned in the introduction to this study – namely, what were the impacts of the understandings I gleaned through the study for me, as an educator and creator of Project of Heart?
To recall a comment made in introducing the main findings, I observed that it might be “unreasonable” to expect educators to experience profound and discourse-disrupting changes to their pedagogy and even emerge as “changed” people through their experience in teaching the Project of Heart module.

Yet I have come to understand that implicit throughout this inquiry – and in the development of POH itself – was an unstated expectation that settler teachers would, on finding out the truth of our collective history through participating in POH, undergo just such a personal transformation; a change that would impact how they saw themselves and their own community in relation to Indigenous peoples. After all, such a transformation had taken place when my own studies had revealed these new truths to me; I was compelled to “feel” them. If a suitable affective component could be transmitted through POH I assumed that the impact, especially through emotionally-charged segments like the Survivor’s testimony, it would then be enough to bring participating mainstream educators to realize their individual and group complicity in the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples today. And this new understanding might fuel a heartfelt desire to take political action to make the concrete change needed to help make justice become a reality. In other words, despite the dispassionate or “objective” tone of my comments at the time of summarizing the findings, I still thought that through enacting all the parts of
Project of Heart, the teachers and students would indeed become “changed” people, moved by empathy, and earnest desire to do something to make a difference in the lived realities of Indigenous peoples today.

Instead, what struck hardest for me on reflecting on the findings was the folly in ever imagining that simply delivering a teaching module, whether over a period of days or a period of weeks, was ever going to be enough to provide the critical self-reflection that teaching for decolonization requires. Kumashiro states that one never realizes how what we are teaching and how we’re teaching will be taken up by learners (2009). So, in many respects, I have to understand and “take to heart” that while I was disappointed that more teachers did not embrace what I consider to be a pivotal piece (Part 5, the social justice action piece, demonstrably the most useful component of the Project in indicating a settler’s acknowledgement of being systemically complicit in abominable crimes against children), I’m also aware that not all teachers will respond the way I want them to, and start challenging received ideologies and time-worn assumptions in order to make changes that would be in our collective best interest. As anti-oppression and social justice scholar Dr. Carol Schick advises (personal electronic correspondence February 14, 2017), “…we never really know what people are learning from what we teach them. It calls into question what any of us can know about our teaching.”
But if it is indeed the case that educators can never really ascertain the real impact of their teaching, there is one thing we can know, and it is surely the true reason for Project of Heart’s success. It is the powerful passion for justice that young learners will always demonstrate, if their education will only but give them the means to express it.
I have divided this section into two categories. The first are steps that would enhance teaching outcomes for Project of Heart on a *systems basis*. The second are steps to enhance teaching outcomes which I have personally undertaken as a response to the study and the under-utilization of part 5 of Project of Heart.

*Steps to enhance teaching outcomes for Project of Heart systemically*

1) Teacher education candidates (pre-service teachers) should be educated as to what constitutes social justice. Then they need to be taught how to implement teaching it within the classroom.

2) Boards of Education and Teachers’ Federations/Unions across the country, in collaboration with Indigenous peoples, communities, and organizations, should develop Professional Education for practising teachers that focus on ways in which to support First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities as they seek to revitalize their institutions.

3) Faculties of Education should develop and offer, in collaboration with Indigenous communities, courses dedicated to educating pre-service teachers on ways in which the
“Calls to Action” of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission can be implemented into existing education curricula.

4) Faculties of Education should actively seek to form partnerships with Indigenous rights groups and non-Aboriginal (“newcomer”) ally organizations. Developing these relationships will enable students within the faculties to have up-to-date information on current campaigns. Such partnerships would also offer clear and meaningful direction for pre-service teachers keen to embed social justice activities into their practice and pedagogy in ways that support Indigenous sovereignty efforts.

For example, the following campaigns – “I Am a Witness”, “Shannen’s Dream”, and “Jordan’s Principle”– are just three of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society that encourage equity for Indigenous children and their families. KAIROS has an excellent education project called the “Blanket Exercise” which covers 500 years of European colonization of Turtle Island, clearly setting the context for contemporary Indigenous resistance struggles in Canada. Amnesty International continues its education around violence against Indigenous women and girls through its “Stolen Sisters” campaign to close the funding gap to ensure safety and support for Indigenous women and girls escaping violence.
As a final point I cannot overstate the importance of connecting teachers with Indigenous rights/human rights/equity groups (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) that support the efforts of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities to improve the health and wellbeing of their members – especially the children. It was due my working relationships with such groups that Project of Heart was recognized by a Governor General’s Excellence in Teaching History Award.

Steps taken to enhance teaching outcomes for greater completion social justice activities:
the creation of decolonizing teaching learning tools for classroom and professional development use

1. You Tube presentation created for Canada’s History called “Teaching for Decolonization” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cWnHXB_LL0M) Within this webinar I had included a hand-out to teachers titled What’s This “teaching for decolonization” all about?
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1d9ZQy2BVk5ERBlkUIP8JUKlgIhihjennHN53b9HkzKQ/edit

2. Review of Morton and Seixas’ The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts
highlighting its deficit of concrete ‘action-taking’ in response to the sixth historical thinking concept – the ethical dimension.
(http://www.canadashistory.ca/Education/Your-Resources/Articles/Book-review-The-Big-Six-Historical-Thinking-Concep).


4. An organization called Justice for Indigenous Women (http://j4iw.ca) that can be utilized as a social justice action under Part 5 of ‘Project of Heart’. Students create jewelry from the tile they decorated in part 5 of Project of Heart and use it as the artifact to teach about the trajectory of incarceration of FNMI girls 1) at Indian Residential Schools through to their captivity as adults in Canada’s Criminal Justice system and 2) their apprehensions as babies and children from their communities by Canada’s child welfare authorities. This education tool is designed to be used from Kindergarten up and through to Colleges and Universities. Workshop presentations/lesson plans are posted on the Justice for Indigenous Women website.
Note: To demonstrate how one University’s Education program is giving evidence of their commitment to social justice, at the time of writing, Project of Heart is currently being offered to Education students as a type of training. Web users can navigate to:


and at the bottom of the page, a notice reads: The Faculty of Education is committed to addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 calls to action. As part of our commitment, we have facilitated Project of Heart training for all of our Year 2 Primary/Junior teacher candidates and established a First Nations, Métis and Inuit Teacher Education advisory committee [Viewed on March 2, 2017].
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Appendix A – Circular Rubric: Assessment and Evaluation

Project of Heart and the Medicine Wheel in Motion for the Evaluation and Assessment of Student Achievement

Legend:
- Aspects of the whole student
- Achievement categories
- Evaluator/Assessor
- Parts of Project of Heart targeting specific aspects of whole student
- Learner outcomes

The Medicine Wheel Recognizes:
- centrality of learner
- wholistic learning
- experiential education
- transformative nature of learning
- importance of relationships and “meaning-making”

Western (Ontario Ministry of Education) tradition

Part 1: Learn about IRS
Part 2: Learn historical & contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples where chosen IRS stands
Part 3: Decoration of tiles
Part 4: Elder/Survivor conducts ceremony & answers questions
Part 5: Social justice action
Appendix B – Comparative Analysis of Learning: Indigenous vs Western Worldview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT OF HEART LEARNING CONTENT</th>
<th>INDIGENOUS ANALYSIS</th>
<th>WESTERN ANALYSIS</th>
<th>EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Part 1 - Knowledge of Indian Residential Schools (IRS)  
- Number of child deaths/genocide  
- Intergenerational trauma  
- Incarcerative aspects  
- Church groups who managed them | Mind, Heart | Ontario Ministry Curriculum Achievement Categories  
1) Knowledge/Understanding | |
| Part 2 - Partnering of school with chosen IRS to  
commemorate  
- Contributions of Indigenous people  
  historical/contemporary  
- Distinctive Indigenous nations and relationship  
  to geography/territory of the chosen IRS | Mind | 1) Knowledge/Understanding  
2) Thinking/Inquiry | |
| Part 3 - Decoration of tiles (each symbolic of the death  
of one child due to the IRS experience -  
response to newly acquired knowledge  
- Artistic expression of heart/spirit knowledge  
as gesture of reconciliation | Body, Heart | 3) Communication  
4) Application | |
| Part 4 - IRS Survivor/Elder/Cultural worker invited to  
class to answer questions/conduct smudging  
ceremony of decorated tiles  
- Students learn Indigenous protocol for visiting  
Elder/survivor (tabacco offering, etc.) | Heart, Spirit | | |
| Part 5 - Social justice actions to address on-going  
colonization of Indigenous people  
- Student acceptance of responsibility for our  
(settler) governance by taking action to address  
current injustices (i.e. signing petitions/writing  
letters to MPs or MPPs, attending rallies)  
- Second gesture of reconciliation | Mind, Heart, Body, Spirit | 1) Knowledge/Understanding  
2) Thinking/Inquiry  
3) Communication  
4) Application | |
Appendix C – Questionnaire

January 25, 2011

**Questionnaire:** Name:  Date:  The purpose of this questionnaire is to acquire baseline data that would accomplish three things: (a) identify whether or not the teacher can be used as a research subject; (b) ascertain how useful the information sent in the Project of Heart kit was to the teacher; and (c) elucidate which parts of the project were perceived by the teacher to be of greatest value to him or her, to be the greatest value to the students being taught, and to be the greatest value to all Ontario students when teaching about the Indian Residential School (IRS) phenomena.

Note: For questions 4 through 13, using the Likert scale of graduated response, please answer questions to quantify amounts or degrees of importance according to the following:
1: little or none
2: some
3: average
4: above average
5: a lot

1) **How do you identify yourself?** Please circle one of the following:
   a. First Nations
   b. Inuit
   c. Metis
   d. Non-Indigenous: recent immigrant or long-term settler

2) **What parts of the project did you/your students complete?**
   a. Research part
   b. Contributions of the Indigenous to Canadian society
   c. Tile decorating
   d. Indigenous participation (elder/IRS survivor)
   e. Social Justice
   f. All components of the project

3) **What other research materials on the IRSs, if any, did you use to meet the needs of your students doing the project?**
   a. novels/stories
   b. DVDs/Videos
   c. internet resources
   d. all the above
   e. no other materials other than what was in the POH kit

4) **On a scale of 1 to 5, how many years' experience have you had teaching in Ontario schools with 1 being one to five years' experience, and 5 being 25 years' experience or over?**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>less than 5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more than 20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix C – Questionnaire (continued)
5) On a scale of 1 to 5 how thorough would you classify your knowledge of Indigenous Canadian history?
1 2 3 4 5

6) On a scale of 1 to 5, how thorough would you classify your knowledge of contemporary issues (social, political, economic) facing Indigenous people in Canada today?
1 2 3 4 5

7) On a scale of 1 to 5, how thorough would you classify your knowledge of the IRS phenomena before embarking on Project of Heart with your students?
1 2 3 4 5

8) On a scale of 1 to 5, how thorough would you classify your knowledge of the IRS phenomena after completing Project of Heart with your students?
1 2 3 4 5

9) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate to what extent you used the material provided for you in the POH kit with 1 being "used very few elements of the kit" to 5 being "used all elements of the kit."
1 2 3 4 5

10) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how you understand the importance of POH to the teaching of your particular subject or to the "incorporation of the Aboriginal Perspective" into your subject area:
1 2 3 4 5

11) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how you understand the importance of POH to Aboriginal students in your classroom/school.
1 2 3 4 5

12) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important you think POH is to the non-Aboriginal students in your classroom/school.
1 2 3 4 5

13) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important you think the knowledge is that you have personally gained from doing POH with your students, to your own growth as a teacher.
1 2 3 4 5

14) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important you think POH is to your personal knowledge for being an informed and engaged Canadian citizen.
1 2 3 4 5

15) On a scale of 1 to 5, rate how important you think this project is to all Ontario students.
1 2 3 4 5
Appendix D – Interviewing Guide

Interviewing Guide

1) Tell me about why you decided to do Project of Heart.

2) What were some of the most challenging aspects of implementing Project of Heart?
   a. Were there any parts of POH that made you feel uncomfortable or that you felt were unnecessary? If so, which parts made you feel uncomfortable and why do you think that was?
   b. Do you feel as though any "disconnects" happened, and if so, what were they?
   c. What were some of the biggest challenges of seeing POH through to completion?

3) What part(s) of the project made you feel as though "connections" were being made between the students and the material being presented?
   a. Were there any parts of POH that excited you, and if so, what were they?

4) Did any parts of the project bring a heightened awareness to your positioning as a "settler", and if so, in which parts did this happen and how?
   a. Has your identification as “Canadian” been affected through your participation in POH and if so, how?

5) What were your feelings about doing the social justice piece at the end of the project?
   a. Why do you think this piece is/is not important to the project?
   b. Tell me about how POH has or has not influenced you to think and care about contemporary justice issues that affect Indigenous people today.
   c. Tell me about how POH has or has not influenced you to be active in addressing injustices with respect to Aboriginal people in Canada.

6) What student opinions/reflections have been raised after completing this project?
   a. Were you surprised by any of them and if so, why?

7) Tell me what worth there is or is not, in teaching and modeling for social justice in the classroom.
   a. What would encourage you to involve yourself or your students in activism in the classroom in the future?
   b. What would discourage you?

8) What is your understanding of the goals of Project of Heart?
   a. In what ways do you feel you have met them?
   b. In what ways do you feel you may have "missed the mark"
   c. How clearly do you feel you understood the purpose of each of the 5 elements of POH?
Appendix D – Interviewing Guide (continued)

9) Has doing POH affected your understanding of settler privilege in Canada today and if so, in what way/s?

10) Is there anything else you think I should know or understand better? Are there any questions you would like to ask me?
Dear ______________,

Thank you for taking part and leading your class through Project of Heart.

I am tracking some of the outcomes of Project of Heart as part of the research I am doing for my Master’s thesis (Education), and I’d like to find out what your perceptions are regarding the work you did with your students.

My thesis supervisor is Dr. Marc Spooner. He can be reached at ___________ and his email address is ___________. If you prefer to contact him by post, please address your correspondence to Dr. Marc Spooner, Faculty of Education, University of Regina, 3737 Wascana Parkway, Regina, SK, S4S 0A2. Please note that this research project has been approved by the Review Ethics Board at the University of Regina.

If you would be willing to take part in a interview as well as fill out a short questionnaire, can I ask you to contact me as soon as is convenient, at ___________ or by phone at ___________.

Kind regards,

Sylvia Smith
Appendix F  – Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

FACULTY OF EDUCATION Regina, Saskatchewan
Canada, S4S 0A2
fax: (306) 585-4880
www.uregina.ca/educ

January 25, 2011

Participation Consent Form

Project Title:
Examining Teachers’ Perceptions of an Indian Residential School Awareness-Raising Program in Ontario: Study of an Action Research Project.

Researcher:
Sylvia Smith, Masters of Education student, University of Regina
Phone: [redacted]
email: [redacted]

Supervisor:
Dr. Marc Spooner, Faculty of Education, University of Regina
Phone: [redacted]
email: [redacted]

Purpose and Objectives of the Study:
The first objective is to find out what teachers learned while engaging in an Indian Residential Schools Project called Project of Heart. The second objective is to ascertain what teachers ‘felt while learning’ as they participated in Project of Heart. The third objective is to determine if participating in this project changed their teaching in any way. It is expected that by examining Project of Heart’s effectiveness (or lack thereof) future steps might be suggested that will enhance teacher/facilitator efficacy in delivering the module’s outcomes. More broadly, the study is expected to elicit a better understanding of both the obstacles and the opportunities encountered by mainstream teachers as they attempt to teach about Indian Residential Schools.

Procedures:
Ten individual interview questions (recorded digitally) will be followed by a short questionnaire. The interviews will be conducted in person or over the phone. Both the interviews and questionnaire (hard-copy) will be completed confidentially. The total length of time to complete both the interview and questionnaire will be approximately 45 to 90 minutes.

Potential Risks:
There is minimal risk to you by participating in this research. You are encouraged to only answer questions you feel comfortable with.
Appendix F – Consent Form (continued)

Potential benefits:
It is hoped this study will suggest future steps that can enhance teacher/facilitator effectiveness in teaching an Indian Residential School project that seeks to educate learners about Canadian society’s systemic racism against Indigenous people, and engage in constructive actions to address it. In a larger context, if it can be demonstrated that teachers can engage positively to integrate justice issues into their teaching, a template may then emerge for ways to deliver an anti-oppression based curriculum centering on other minoritized groups’ issues.

Compensation:
There will be no compensation offered to participants. Only snacks or small meals will be provided should interviews be done in person.

Confidentiality:
Participation is entirely voluntary. The data from this research project will be published and presented at conferences. The Consent Forms will be stored separately from the materials used, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.

The data collected will be used to fulfill the requirements for a Masters of Education. The data will be reported in a thesis format, available from the University of Regina after completion. Direct quotations will be reported, but personally-identifying information will not be included in the report.

There are several options for the participant to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. You are asked to put a check on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:

be audio-taped: Yes:____ No:____
be video-taped: Yes:____ No:____

You are asked to put a check mark on the line(s) which states:

I wish to remain anonymous: Yes:____ No:____
I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to a pseudonym: Yes:____ No:____
The pseudonym I choose for myself is: ___________________________

OR

You may quote me and use my actual name. I realize that my answers will not be confidential at that point.

Storage of Data:
Data will be stored on the researcher’s password protected computer in a locked office at #2 Craftsman Private, Ottawa, Ontario. The hard copy will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the
same office at the same address (#2 Craftsman Private, Ottawa). When the data is no longer required, it will be destroyed.

Right to Withdraw:
  a. You may refuse to answer individual questions. If you wish to withdraw any responses after the interview is complete you may do so up until 2 months following the interview.

  b. Participation is entirely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the research project at any time up until 2 months following the interview. When and if you withdraw, your data will be deleted from the research project and destroyed at your request.

Follow up:
  At your request, I will forward you the results of the research either electronically or by hard-copy, whichever is your preference.

Questions or Concerns:
  The proposed research project was reviewed and approved on ethical grounds by the University of Regina’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to the committee at (306) 585-4775 research.ethics@uregina.ca. Out of province participants may call collect.

Consent: SIGNED CONSENT
  Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.
I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of the Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

In the case that you have agreed to be quoted by name, please circle statement a. or b. below according to which best describes how you would like to be identified in the results:

a. I agree to be identified by name/credited in the results of the study.
b. I agree to have my responses attributed to me by name in the results.

________________________ (please initial here)

Name of Participant: _______________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________
Name of Researcher: ________________________________
Signature: _________________________________________________
Date: ________________________________