

Analyzing Indigenous Histories to Inform the Future: A Phenomenological Exploration of Chronic Student Absenteeism in Northern Saskatchewan

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ADS 840

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Mock Defense Outline

Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The land of living skies- The problem- Research statement- Research questions- Definitions of terms- Potential significance- Delimitations- Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Theoretical framework- Future topics to investigate- Proposed organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Qualitative research design- Positionality- Ethical considerations- Data sources- Participant selection- Data collection- Causation coding- Credibility and dependability- Triangulation

Chapter 1

An Introduction





Quick Facts

- Approximately 262, 280 km² (162, 978 mi²)
- Home to 70 communities
- Some communities can only be accessed by plane
- 0.1 people/km²
- 3% of the total provincial population live in the north
- 80% are Indigenous

Some Inconvenient Truths

- Government fully acknowledges that the north has:
 - Lower income
 - Low quality infrastructure
 - Limited access to housing
 - Limited access to K-12 education
 - Limited access to post-secondary education
 - Limited access to healthcare

Education in the North

- Northern Lights School Division (NLSD) is in the north
- NLSD is the province's largest (by geography, not numbers) publicly funded division
- 22 schools in 17 communities
- NLSD is of particular interest due to:
 - Geographic location
 - Economic circumstances
 - The demographic of students that attend

An Indigenous-Centered School Division

- In 2022-2023 annual report, 86.4% of students self-identified as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI)
- The school division places special focus on supporting FNMI students by:
 - Traditional language immersion programs
 - Creating new partnerships with outside agencies
 - Creating teacher education programs targeting Indigenous students
 - Promote Elder involvement
 - Developing culturally relevant assessment techniques
 - Extensive land-based education programs

Despite Best Efforts

- Students do not attend school regularly
- Attendance patterns are concerning
- Attendance data released by the province has indicated attendance declining among FNMI students prior to the COVID-19 pandemic

Unintended Consequences

- Students who are absent tend to:
 - Drop out
 - Engage in risky behaviors
 - Unable to reach grade-level curricula
 - Have higher unemployment rates later in life
 - Have increased mental health concerns
 - Have lower cognitive abilities
- In general, the literature indicates that skipping school has negative life-long impacts

Reasons for Skipping Class

- Some students are absent because:
 - The school building itself
 - The students in the building
 - The staff in the building
 - Family/life circumstances
- But, significant (and collective) circumstances like the residential school system have not been adequately examined as a potential link to current attendance patterns
- Considering 86.4% of northern students are FNMI, contextualizing absenteeism ought to be done thoughtfully

Research Statement

Given the identities and histories of many northern Saskatchewan families, a likelihood exists that students are descendants of survivors who attended the Canadian residential school system.

Thus, current attendance patterns could be an additional manifestation of intergenerational trauma experienced by those connected to the Canadian residential school system.

Research Questions

1. How has the residential school system impacted current attendance patterns in northern Saskatchewan?
2. What are students' and parents' current feelings and emotions towards the K-12 public education system?
3. What changes should be made to the traditional K-12 education system to support Indigenous students better?
4. What do students need to get back into the classroom regularly?
5. What do parents/caregivers need to get support for their student(s)?

Definition of Terms

Term	Definition
Attendance	A physical headcount of students <i>actually in</i> classrooms receiving instruction.
Enrolment	A total headcount of students <i>expected</i> to be receiving instruction.
Indigenous People	An inclusive/collective term in the broadest sense; FNMI people who have common ancestry with the original inhabitants of Canada.
Cultural Genocide	The strategic dismantling and destruction of political systems, land, education, language, spirituality, family units and sacred objects.
Assimilation	The forced absorption of Indigenous people into mainstream Canadian society against their will.
Intergenerational Trauma	The effects of cultural genocide felt by both survivors and descendants of survivors.

Potential Significance

- What will likely continue if nothing changes:
 - Implementation of current tone-deaf policies
 - Absenteeism
 - Perpetuation of intergenerational trauma
 - Create additional strain on health, criminal justice, and social assistance sectors
- Maybe:
 - Schools are doing as much as they can right now?
 - Supporting FNMI goes well beyond school- or division-based solutions?
 - Large-scale education policy changes are needed?
 - Social and health policies need to be re-examined?

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations	Limitations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Geographic boundaries• Participant boundaries• Theoretical boundaries• Research design boundaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unable to generalize• Snowball sampling• Positionality of the researcher• Only plausible causation; no statistical analysis• Willingness of the participants to share

Chapter 2

The background of the slide is a photograph of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) in a dark night sky. The lights are primarily green and appear as vertical, shimmering curtains of light. The bottom of the image shows the dark silhouettes of trees against the glowing sky.

A Review of Relevant Literature

Historical Trauma Theory

- Assumptions that underpin the theory:
 1. Dominant groups perpetuate an oppressive act towards a subordinate group
 2. Trauma is inflicted upon the subordinate group for an extended period
 3. Unresolved trauma becomes a collective experience and memory for all members of the subordinate group
 4. The subordinate group exhibits historical trauma response to cope with the sweeping generational effects

Historical Trauma Theory as a Lens

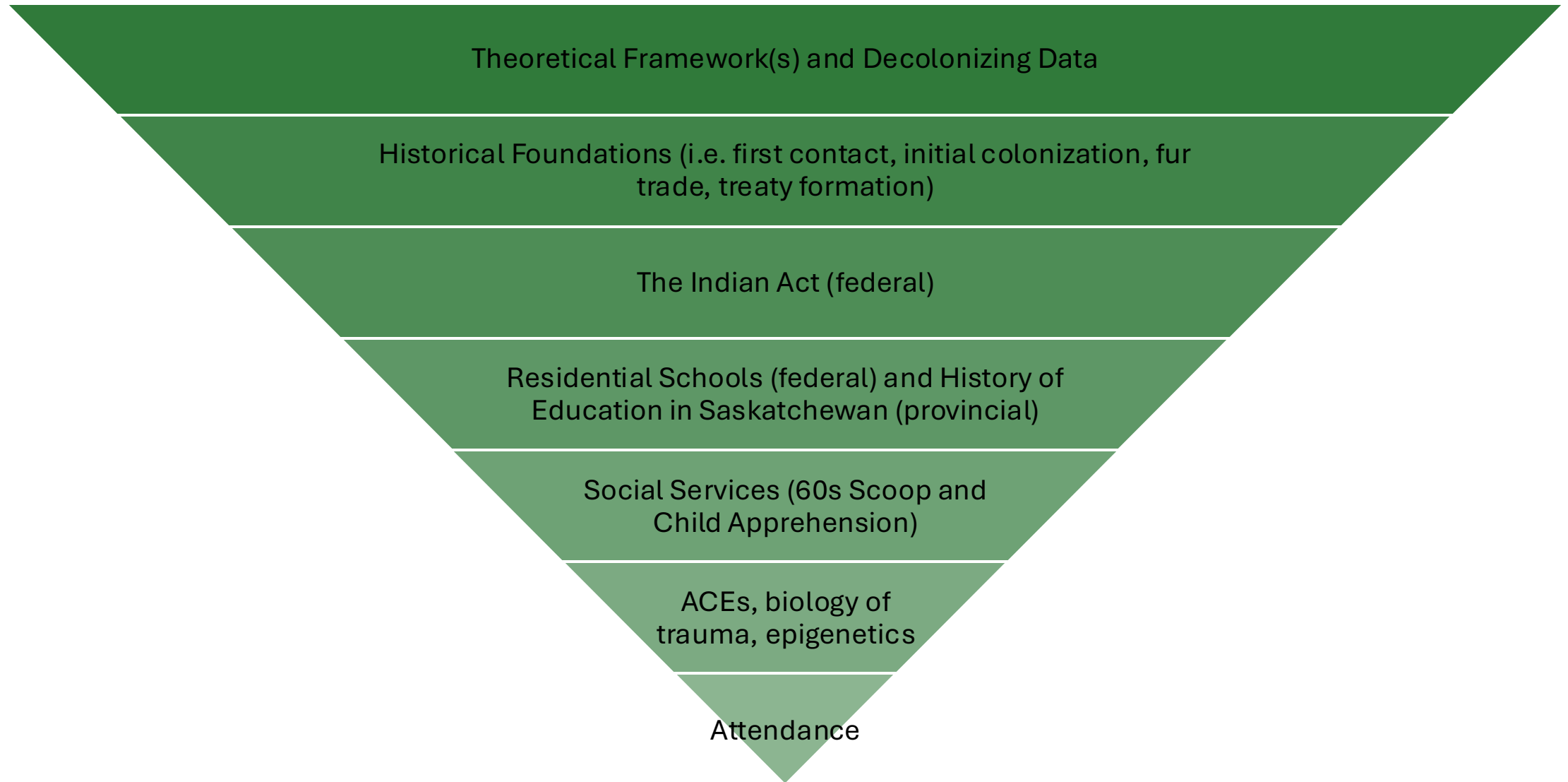
- We can use historical trauma theory as a lens to help understand what happened to Indigenous people in Canada

The Oppressor	First, the British and French enacted oppression. Then, the government and churches did.
The Extensive Timeline	Oppression has gone on since first contact; sustained and intensified for generations with the residential school system
The Collective Experience	The traumatic impact on subsequent generations is dependent upon the quality of parenting which is dependent upon how parents/grandparents were treated in the residential school system
Trauma Response	Substance abuse, mental health disorders, childhood sexual abuse, PTSD, (maybe chronic student absenteeism?)

Topics To Investigate

- In addition to what was already researched in ADS 830:
 - Further exploration of theoretical frameworks; power dynamics
 - Anti-racist perspectives
 - Decolonizing data; power and ownership of information
 - First contact with the French and British; when/how did oppression begin?
 - Doctrine of discovery; the justification given for colonization
 - Indigenous relationships with the Crown; treaty formation; promises kept?
 - The Indian Act
 - History of education in Saskatchewan
 - Further exploration of residential schools
 - Sixties scoop
 - Social services; apprehended children
 - Trauma stored at the molecular level
 - Epigenetics; turning genes on or off depending on the environment

Proposed Organization



Chapter 3

Methodology



Research Design

- Qualitative
 - An unexplored topic specific to a marginalized group of individuals based upon unique historical circumstances
- Phenomenological
 - Trying to understand the experiences of others

Positionality - What is real? How?

- Ontology and epistemology are interrelated because **what** someone believes to be **true/real** is influenced on **how** they experience the world
- Therefore, a **subjectivist approach** will be taken in the creation of new knowledge; Indigenous realities are justified through experiences of attempted cultural genocide

Positionality - The Researcher

- Studying chronic student absenteeism is of personal and professional interest
- Comes from a privileged upbringing different than many Indigenous people living in Canada
- More aware of and sensitive to Indigenous histories and challenges than the average Canadian
- Assumes a role of allyship
- Aware of power imbalances between him and the researched

Positionality - Emic and Etic Positions

- Due to several years living and working within Indigenous communities, the researcher can view the issue more intimately than others – **an emic (or insider) perspective**
- However, the researcher does not claim to be Indigenous and has had very different life experiences which creates psychological distance from the issue – **an etic (or outsider) perspective**

However ...

- **Both emic and etic positions** will be used strategically throughout the project
- Emic perspective will be used to:
 - Establish connections
 - Build trust
 - Start conversations
 - Gather rich data
- Etic perspective will be used to:
 - Objectively analyze histories and narratives
 - Use historical trauma theory as a lens

Ethical Considerations

- In addition to regular IRB approval processes at Niagara, the following ethical considerations will be taken into consideration:
 - Elder involvement/approval
 - Approval from school board, Director of Education, and Deputy Director of Education
 - Emphasis of voluntary involvement and anonymity
 - Involvement of counseling services

Data Sources

- Indigenous voices are central to this project
- Indigenous folks from northern Saskatchewan

Participant Selection

- Interview people from the following groups:
 - Group 1: Elders
 - Group 2: Recent high school graduates
 - Group 3: Parents of students that do not attend
- Each group would, ideally, have 3 willing participants (9 in total)
- Selection criteria:
 - Self-identify as Indigenous
 - Live in northern Saskatchewan
 - Personal connection to the residential school system
- Snowball sampling

Data Collection

- Semi-structured interviews
- 7 open-ended questions with prompts embedded

Analysis

- Causation coding
 - Understanding the potential cause and effect based upon narratives shared by participants
 - Triplet coding that involves identifying antecedent conditions, mediating variables, and outcomes
- Emerging themes would be used to create a causation map to see how all themes could plausibly connect together

Credibility and Dependability

- Participants will be provided with an opportunity to review transcript to ensure accuracy
- Participants will also be able to review results of causation coding analysis to confirm whether the derived meaning was what the participant intended
- Actual attendance data will be requested from the school division (triangulation)