Critical Education

Imagining Spaces Created for Queer Métis Youth

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Abstract

Educational spaces, both formal and informal, are not always welcoming to queer Métis youth, especially to those youth who connect more to hip-hop cultures than those activities like jigging and beading which are often held up as pillars of Métis culture. This article draws on conversations with youth, conducted as part of doctoral research using a visiting approach to data collection and analyzed using the voice-centered relational method. Through these frameworks, I created guideposts for developing educational spaces which are not just inclusive of but designed for queer Métis youth. These guideposts will be used in future development of research with and for queer Métis youth.

Taanshi kiyawaaw - Lucy Fowler p wambdi to wiyan d-ishinikaashon. Winnipeg d-oschin. En Michif niya. I come to this discussion of creating spaces for queer Métis youth both as an educator who is dedicated to creating better spaces for my students, and as a queer Métis person who had hoped for these spaces in my own education. To better understand the perspective I lend to this conversation, I will begin by situating myself in my family as well as within the research (Absolon, 2004; Steinhauer, 2001; Wilson, 2008). I am a Two-Spirit Métis woman who was born and raised in Winnipeg, Manitoba. On my maternal side, I have Métis ancestors who took scrip in St. Andrews and St. Johns, Manitoba, and I have familial ties to Norway House, Oxford House, the Orkney Islands, and Britain. My paternal family are from Carlow, Ireland. My adoptive father was Dakota from Sioux Valley Dakota Nation in Manitoba. I was raised in the city and my Métis family spoke often about our ancestry and our community and the history of our people, but we had long stopped practicing any Métis cultural activities. I grew up going to ceremony from a very young age with my adopted paternal family. I'm thankful for those opportunities and to have been raised in the culture, but, in part because of this deep connection to Dakota traditions, I felt out of place in Métis spaces. I didn't know how to jig, I didn't own a sash, I couldn't play the fiddle. I wasn't sure I should or could claim being Métis, despite having the citizenship card, and I didn't want to take up space from others who might have been raised in the culture. This self-doubt in my youth led me to avoid Métis community spaces and I often wonder how many connections and memories I might have made with other Métis youth had I felt entitled to accessing those spaces. It is that wondering that inspired this article, based on my doctoral research – how can I create Métis community and educational spaces that are welcoming to all Métis youth?

This study also included a queer lens. Being queer was another facet of my identity that I did not feel comfortable claiming openly for many years. I don't know the first moment I knew that I was queer, but I do remember the first moment I was othered for it. I didn't realize it until recently, but that incident shaped the way that I shared (or, more often, didn't share) that part of me. My teachers may have thought that the school was a safe space for queer students, but they were unaware of what was happening outside of supervision. That wondering, too, shaped this article. How can we create spaces that are pro-actively inclusive of, and safe for, queer `students?

Methodology

The participants in this study were eight young Métis folks from across the Métis homelands. Of the eight participants, one identified themselves as gay and one as straight, while the other six used a variety of different terms, including gay, queer, bisexual, omnisexual, and ecosexual. Each participant spoke about Two Spirit identity, but only four participants ever referred to themselves as being Two Spirit. Data was collected through interviews conducted over Zoom, which were then transcribed and analyzed.

Analysis

I selected the voice-centered relational method of data analysis for its rigour and its ability to lend space to my own experiences, to incorporate elements of a visiting methodology as conceptualized by Métis scholars (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2019), and its requirement that the researcher enter into relationship with the data. The voice-centered relational method (also called the Listening Guide) comes from the work of Carol Gilligan and blends together psychological analysis with thematic analysis of data. Within this method, "the quality of collected data depends in part on qualities of the researcher-participant relationship" (Chu, 2014, p. 4). The

voice-centered relational method is multi-staged, and made up of several consecutive readings of the text.

Reading 1. The first reading begins with the researcher becoming very familiar with the data and noting their own responses or reactions while reading[1] (also called listening in this method, in that one is listening to and for the text - and subtext - while reading). These initial reactions varied quite significantly from one transcript to the next. Some of these initial reactions were merely acknowledgements of a relationship being built and at other times I noted my own negative reactions or noted memories that were triggered by the conversation. For example, when one participant, Kendel, is discussing the different art media he uses, I noted how interesting it was to read about his mastery of multiple art forms and noted that, in high school, I would have felt jealous of "someone who could just pick up any form of art and excel at it. Maybe I still am a little jealous of the level of creativity and drive it takes to excel in so many ways." This first reading can be compared to a first conversation with someone as you enter into a relationship with them; some of the comments are things that I might have said aloud back to the other person, and some are things I might have thought and not shared. In this way, I am entering into a relationship with the text (A. Wilson, personal communication, November 26, 2021).

Reading 2. The researcher then reads through the text again, this time noting the plot, or what is happening in the text. While in the first reading, the researcher was only meeting the text in a cursory way, now the relationship is starting to build. The researcher begins to get to know the text, getting "a sense of where we are or what the territory is by identifying the stories that are being told, what is happening, when, where, with whom, and why" (Gilligan, 2015, p. 160). Unlike the first reading where I shared my own initial reactions, in this second reading I am building this relationship with the text and the participant, and recounting the plot that I saw in the text. The same section of text which elicited some jealousy from me as I read through it, I summarized thusly:

> K is an artistic person and has tried many different mediums - comic books are what he's most interested in right now. His current project is about a hip hop artist - the kind of person he wishes he was but he's too shy to be. K also talks about all the different kinds of creative expression they do and want to do - mixtapes, spoken word, stop motion, music videos - he doesn't see himself ever performing live but he has many other kinds of expression that interest him.

The summary of the plot is an opportunity to bring attention to moments that the researcher feels are important in the context of the conversation or in the context of the research questions.

Reading 3. Next, the researcher creates "I" poems out of the text, which involves reading through and selecting all sentences that begin with "I" and their verb and creating another document with each sentence on a new line. This process is meant to make subconscious thought come to the surface (Gilligan, 2015) and reveal changes in the participant's language that might indicate a subconscious feeling different from the words being said. I spoke to Amber about how

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[1] In this article, the terms "reading" and "listening" are used interchangeably when referring to the Listening Guide method of data analysis as a nod to the process itself requiring the researcher to listen to and for the text and subtexts while reading. Some practitioners of the Listening Guide method also listen (literally) to recorded interviews during this process.

she thought about her Métis identity, and how it impacted her work. This comes through in one of the "I" poems created out of her transcript.

> I am
>
> I got older
>
> I know if I like say I'm Metis
>
> I'll be like, taken less seriously
>
> I just think
>
> I just don't have either
>
> I don't
>
> I probably
>
> I might get a Metis card.
>
> I just kind of just exist.

Amber's speech is hesitant at times, peppered with words like "just" and "probably" and "might". She worries that she won't be able to do her work in community as effectively as a Métis person as she does now, and does not want to jeopardize her career by getting a Métis card. When I read this section of Amber's "I" poem, it is striking to me the confidence with which she says she will be taken less seriously, contrasted with the repeated hesitation that follows. I wondered, reading it, if Amber's hesitation came from feeling torn about this decision and wishing she could publicly present herself as a Métis person, or if the hesitation came from a sense of embarrassment at admitting this, or if it came from somewhere else entirely. The "I" poem's job is to give the researcher a deeper look into the thinking of the participant.

Reading 4 (and onward). The final "listenings" are a chance for the researcher to begin to name the contrapuntal voices that are heard throughout the text. The term contrapuntal is borrowed from music theory, and in the Listening Guide method refers to two or more different threads of a narrative that may run parallel to each other, or may contradict each other, just as in music there can be harmonies and dissonances throughout a piece. There may be several contrapuntal voices that are obvious after the initial listenings, or the researcher may need to reflect to uncover these voices. Gilligan (2015) advised finding the contrapuntal voices one at a time and noting each with a different coloured marker on the printed transcript before starting at the beginning again to go through and listen for the next contrapuntal voice. I instead used different filters on Adobe Acrobat to indicate the different contrapuntal voices as I completed each reading. In figure 1 below, the section of text shown has two contrapuntal voices noted; the green underline is for the "voice of surety of self," and the pink denotes a second contrapuntal voice, the "voice of uncertainty". The majority of the paragraph has been underlined with green, indicating that Kendel speaks confidently of himself and his work, but the pink voice near the top of the paragraph shows a bit of uncertainty: he calls the fact that he's based a character in a story off of himself silly, and shares how difficult he finds it to "get out there." But the voice of surety of self returns, and Kendel explains that he does still "get out there," even if it is difficult, because "[t]here's people who need to hear my words. And I'm going to find a way to get them out there."
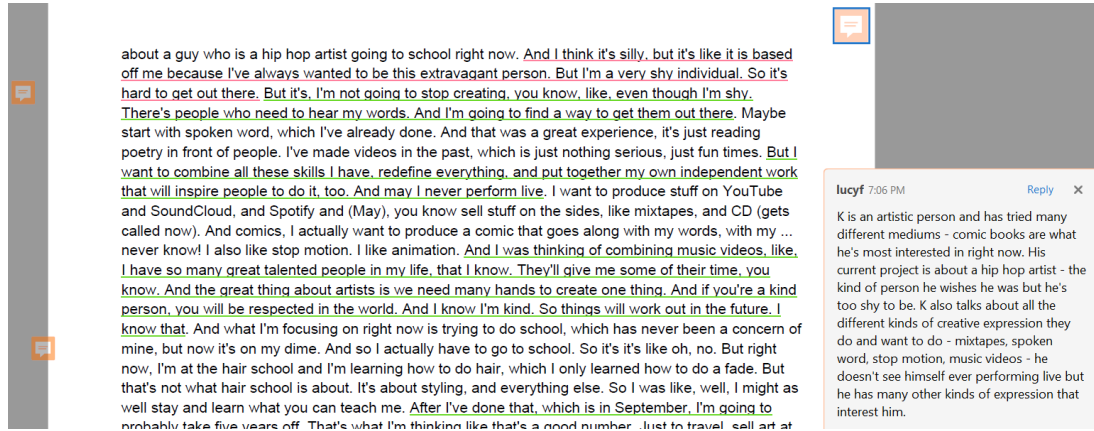
Figure 1. An excerpt from the transcripts of the interview with one participant, who is discussed using the pseudonym, Kendel. The dark orange boxes on the left represent the first listening, or my reactions; the light orange box on the right is a summary of the plot. There are two contrapuntal voices in the image, represented by different colours of underline seen within the text.

After the analysis process concluded, I had identified five contrapuntal voices, including the two discussed above, that spoke back to my research questions. The other three voices were "the voice of facilitating learning," "the voice of interrupted learning," and "where learning happened." The voice-centered relational method produces a significant amount of data, and I have drawn upon the "I" poems, these last three contrapuntal voices, and my own reflections documented throughout the analysis while writing this article.

Secondary Analysis

In thinking about creating safe(r) educational spaces for queer Métis youth, I engaged in yet another listening of the data to discover where, for these participants, did learning take place, as well as what facilitated or disrupted their learning.

These learning spaces varied for participants, though six of the eight participants talked about the learning experiences they had had with their family members which varied from learning skills, traditional activities, cultural histories, and ceremony. One participant, Amber, shared,

> I was really close to my grandma when we were young. So we would go to powwows, and I used to be a jingle dress dancer, and my grandma would smudge with me and she would talk to me about the Creator. And no, she would just tell me stories like creation stories, just stuff like, you know, how the turtle got its cracks on its shell, like, you know, I don't know, those, like, kind of old stories.

Another participant, Avery, also remembered learning cultural histories and ceremonies from her family, saying that she, along with her mother, "always used to smudge when I was little. And she has a drum and we went to a couple powwows". Other participants, like Kenna and Jessica, learned traditional skills from their family members, like how to live off the land but this learning was not explicitly named by family as being part of Métis culture, but rather a family practice. Other locations that participants named as being learning spaces were both formal (like school, university, or community led programming) and informal (including spending time on the land,

listening to hip-hop music, and self-exploration).

How learning was disrupted. Learning, regardless of location, was most often disrupted for the participants by educators or community leaders. Participants shared stories of learning disrupted by educators who perpetuated racist stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, were openly anti-queer, or tokenized the participants and the knowledges that they brought to those spaces. The textbooks used by Amber's teachers included content about pre-contact Indigenous nations, but after that "you kind of just like, never hear about Indigenous people again, after chapter one, it's kind of like, they're just … faded out of the story completely. So it-- it seems like they just never existed throughout history." Kenna had a slightly different experience, as her teachers taught about Indigenous people broadly, but focused mostly on content about First Nations. For Kenna, hearing about her own nation "was just kind of, like always this like, afterthought, you know, it was like a bonus. Like, I always felt like it was a bonus if I could hear about Métis people". In Amber's experience, when Indigenous topics came up a second time, other students

> ask[ed] me if just about all of like, these benefits … they're like, 'Oh, so you get to like, go to university for free. And like, you're going to save so much money on taxes, like when you buy a car, because Indigenous people don't have to pay taxes on anything.' And I remember like, that was like all news to me.

The third and final instance Amber remembered of discussing Indigenous peoples in school was later in Adult Education, when her teacher spoke about residential schools and took the class on a field trip to one nearby. Amber declined to attend, and wondered in retrospect, "why would I want to do that? But at the time, I honestly just didn't feel like going. … I think that's weird. Like, why do you need to like go tour, a residential school, like, it's just sad." This focus on trauma over resilience and prospering (Tuck, 2009) disconnected Amber even further from an educational system she did not feel connected to. When educators weren't focusing on Indigenous trauma or stereotypes, participants remembered educators looking to them to be the experts on Indigenous histories and cultures, or bringing in speakers that represented only one Indigenous perspective, and did not create space for the Métis students in the room.

Teaching trauma, stereotypes, and limited Indigenous perspectives was not the only way that educators and community leaders disrupted the educational journeys of participants. Being underestimated by educators also came up in conversation with several participants. Isla recounted:

> And I remember like always being inspired to tell a story, always being really a passionate writer around creating ideas and sharing ideas and structuring arguments, but you know spelling and grammar and just like came later, came later to me and I have like so many memories of teachers being like, you know, maybe this you should just focus on something else. They said like wr- writing is not going to be for you.

Isla holds memories of multiple teachers discounting her dreams of being a writer and directly advising her to find another career goal. Isla also found herself in remedial classes, and referred for extra supports for learning disabilities that she did not have. Isla now understands these experiences, as well as the experience of being referred (unnecessarily) to learning disability specialists, as racism, which she names as "a common experience for a lot of Brown students" who are often "put into like, you know, for lack of better words like the dumb stream." For Jessica, the incongruence is due to a mismatch of axiologies. Jessica had difficulties in graduate school classes, and after self-reflection she "I realized my brain was … fundamentally working in a different way

than what my classes were requiring of me. And … it's not that I'm unintelligent, it's that I'm just working from a completely different framework." In order to be successful in the program, Jessica did not want to change the ways she saw the world, her views, but she knew she had to "kind of like, silo them away, which is really fucked up". Other participants did not name racism directly, but did recount similar experiences with educators resulting in feelings of anger and frustration. Amber can "remember like, being irritated just being there. And I felt like I had to make a point. I'm like, Look, I'm not stupid. Like, the only reason I'm here is because like, regular high school is dumb" and Kendel struggles to remember any positive experiences in school, sharing that, "for the most part, I don't remember school other than being angry all the time. For no reason. Just always angry. Like, I hate this. I hate that I have to learn this." This anger interrupted learning and made the prospect of visiting educational spaces one that instilled dread in these Métis youth.

    How learning was supported. Learning was supported, on the other hand, in a number of different ways. Some participants responded well to being challenged and asked to rise to the occasion, or having to compete with others. Amber dropped out of high school, but after getting the high school credential and going to university, things changed for her; she said "University was more of a challenge than high school in terms of -- it's just the amount of work that you get is like, so much to manage, but the actual work you're doing is actually not that hard" and she was able to maintain interest in what she was doing because she "felt challenged enough". This challenge kept Amber interested and motivated, and she has since continued on to graduate school. Avery found herself more motivated to learn when others she knew started learning the same hobby, sharing that she thought at the time, "'Well, if you can do this, then what am I doing?' So I really wanted to that was something else that gave me inspiration to get more into it" and she began working harder on her skills. Isla was also strengthened by the goal of disproving the doubts that teachers had expressed about her future as a writer, and said "You know, I'm kind of one to be inspired by that like 'watch me do it' kind of mentality, which has which has been like, you know, a good source of inspiration in my life." Isla persevered and followed these dreams, partly in response to being told she couldn't, and has since been very successful in her writing career. Another factor that contributed to the participants' success in learning was being around others with similar mindsets or backgrounds. Avery spoke about a community learning space she participated in, and what had made that space a positive one for her. She said

      the most positive thing that I can get out of it is feeling like I am understood, and like I belong, I love being a part of a space where people have the same values as me, and, like, aspirations, and like, we can talk about activism and, you know, often similar political views, and I just, cuz that helps me feel safe. And so if, you know, if everybody's helping each other out to get to where they want to be, I think that would be like the best, the best thing.

While Avery had felt like she could not be totally open with others at school, in this space she felt like she was surrounded by people with similar values and who wanted to help each other reach their goals, and, accordingly, she felt more comfortable being open. Jessica also spoke about not being around other people with similar backgrounds or mindsets in high school, but finding those people once she moved to another learning space; in Jessica's case, it was going to post-secondary that helped create these relationships. In university,

      I met a lot more Indigenous students. And it was through those connections and those friendships that I started meeting other Métis people, and not just other Métis

people, but other Métis people who had a similar vision, as I do, in terms of what it means to be Métis and what it means to honour the kinship ties that we have with other First Nations people. And that's basically brought me to a place now where … I'm just surrounded by incredible, badass, Métis matriarchs.

Jessica notes the importance of not just being around more Métis people, but Métis people with a similar epistemological lens. Like Avery, it is this similarity in mindset that Jessica is most drawn to and which helped make learning spaces more effective for her. Others, like Kendel and Kenna, spoke about learning spaces which allowed them to embody all aspects of themselves. Kendel explained that it can be difficult or even dangerous in certain spaces to be himself, and wear makeup and "androgynous clothes," because he is "read as literally a question mark. And people want to know what that question mark is. And I find myself more comfortable with non-binary people and people that are queer." Kenna chooses to only show the different parts of herself in certain spaces, like hip-hop dance spaces. In those spaces, Kenna said "there's many women who appear more masculine in hip-hop, and vice versa as well. And I think that's powerful. And – those things, it kind of spoke to me in that way." Kenna found herself able to show both masculine and feminine parts of herself in these spaces and did not have to question how she presented herself.

I sat with these stories and shared experiences and, with these considerations in mind, I adapted the findings into guideposts for educational spaces that create affirming educational experiences for Métis youth. These guideposts will inform my future research and work I undertake to improve the educational experiences of Métis youth, and I share them now in hopes that they might benefit the research or program design of others working with queer Métis young people.

Guideposts for educational work with queer Métis youth

1. Inclusion of Métis Elders and knowledge keepers

Several participants spoke about wishing there had been Métis Elders involved in programs they had taken part in. Métis stories, histories, and teachings are often subsumed under the umbrella of First Nations (Dion, 2012), and those Métis histories which are included often fall within the limited scope of discussions around Louis Riel and the Red River and North West Resistances (Kearns & Anuik, 2015) and the erasure in general of Métis experiences (Poitras Pratt, 2021). One participant, who asked to not be named even under a pseudonym, told of their experience in a federal training program that was presented as centered around Indigenous worldviews, but when he arrived at the program, "they only had First Nation elders. Like there was no Métis elders, there was no Inuit elders." When the lack of Métis Elders was brought to the attention of the organizers, there was an older Métis person brought in, but this Elder turned to the participant to share the knowledge he had been brought up with. He had joined this program to learn more cultural teachings, and instead he was being put in the position of knowledge holder. He wanted to say to the organizers, "You guys need a Métis and an Inuit Elder. I was, like, it's very heartbreaking when you have to learn other, like, learn other people's teachings, but you want your own teachings in there as well. I thought -- like, where are my Métis teachings?" If, in the development of programming or educational spaces, it is difficult or impossible to work with Métis knowledge holders, programming should be explicitly named as centered on First Nations teachings instead of using the term Indigenous, which necessarily includes Métis and Inuit. In reflecting on my own pedagogical practice, I noted that, while I often include Métis community

members in educational spaces, they are typically youth themselves, or emerging scholars, and not Métis Elders. This is reflective of my own upbringing, as I did not grow up with Métis teachings, and I only have connections to a few Métis Elders in the community. The building of relationships and prioritizing of the knowledges of Métis Elders must be important pedagogical practice for me going forward.

2. Creation of educational spaces that are physically, spiritually, and emotionally safe for queer Métis youth

Physical Safety. The importance of careful selection of those that are brought into spaces for queer Métis youth does not end with being sure to bring in Métis Elders. Several participants shared concerns about those who are allowed access to spaces with queer Métis youth. These participants expressed worry that, without deliberate selection of both community leaders and youth who are invited into the space (which includes vetting like child abuse registry checks), there is potential for youth to be harmed physically, spiritually, or emotionally. Kenna expressed this very clearly, saying "I'd like want some sort of vetting thing that I knew that when I opened myself up to people that I wasn't talking to somebody who wanted to rape and kill me, you know, at the bare minimum." The fear of physical harm in the form of sexual abuse is not unfounded; queer people experience sexual assault at a higher rate than heterosexual people. The 2020 Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces (2020) found that 59% of queer Canadians had experienced physical or sexual violence in their lives, compared to 37% of heterosexual Canadians, and that queer Indigenous people were at an even higher rate of violence, with 73% disclosing physical assault and 65% disclosing sexual assault at some time in their lives (Statistics Canada, 2020).

Spiritual Safety. Queer Indigenous youth also face the risk of spiritual harm in spaces created for Indigenous peoples. Through the violence and on-going impacts of colonization (including the tools of residential school system, Christianity, and policing of bodies), many Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers have internalized rules around ceremonial spaces and traditional teachings (Wilson, 2015). These rules often prevent those attending ceremonial spaces from wearing clothing that aligns with their gender identity, or from participating in roles in the ceremony that the Elder associates with one gender and not another, and this "results [in] some of our own present-day cultural teachings and practices extend[ing] the continuum of violence that two-spirit people have been subject to" (Wilson, 2015, p. 2). Some of the participants shared that they felt anxious or stressed out about going to new ceremonial spaces that were led by unfamiliar knowledge keepers, or spaces where they were not sure who else would be in attendance. One participant in particular expressed that even if the Elder was clear about welcoming Two Spirit and queer people to ceremony, there had to be others maintaining the safety of the space and ensuring there was no one else in attendance who would try to recreate or enforce these gendered teachings.

Emotional Safety. The third category of harm that participants expressed worry about was emotional harm. Several participants named the experience of Métis identity being subsumed into First Nations or Indigenous identity as emotionally harmful. Others shared experiences of emotional harm connected to community organizations. Kenna shared their story of calling a local queer organization when first wondering about their sexuality, and the feeling of being dismissed and minimized by the reception. This participant spoke at length about how invalidating it felt to have someone in a place that was supposed to be for queer people express confusion about why a person might want support to begin to understand their sexuality. While this participant in

particular was not struggling, she still considered the exchange harmful, and worried that another youth who was in a more vulnerable position could have the same experience and be much more negatively impacted. Kenna said, "if there was a youth that was really struggling, like that could have been it … you know, that could have caused somebody to commit suicide or to, like, run away from their home or do something drastic … it was kind of like, 'I don't care' sort of feeling." The organization was a queer organization but not created by or for Indigenous queer people, and this experience is a reminder that it is important to "stop assuming that all lesbian and gay people can find support in mainstream gay culture, and that we make a point of creating opportunities for two-spirit indigenous people to find their place in their traditional communities" (Wilson, 1996, p. 315). Safer spaces for queer Métis youth should be created pre-emptively, instead of relying on disclosures of violence before reinforcing safety boundaries. Within pedagogical practice, that will include thorough and thoughtful vetting of those I partner with and bring into queer Métis youth spaces. Often, harm is understood by and shared amongst community members, so this vetting cannot be limited to record checks, but instead built around strong community connections.

3. Avoidance of the essentialization of Métis identity

The essentialization of Métis identity to only jigging, beading, Louis Riel, and the fur trade, can alienate Métis youth. While several participants described themselves as having been "raised in the culture," most had only begun to learn their ancestral and cultural roots later on in life. There are some cultural markers that are related to Métis people across the homelands, including languages (like Michif and Bungee), hunting, fishing, and trapping practices, and fur-trade era cultural activities such as jigging, beading, weaving, and wearing a sash. While these activities are not a requirement for membership in a provincial Métis government, they are often on display at large gatherings of Métis people. The focus on these traditional activities and languages often serves to make youth feel a lack of belonging in community spaces, as reflected in previous studies with Métis youth (Fowler, 2017). Belanger et al. (2003) draw a parallel between this belief that an "authentic" Indigenous culture is restricted to place and the white colonial agenda of the country, and an indoctrination into colonial ideas of Indigeneity. After all, if "authentic" Indigeneity exists only on the reserve and in relation to hunting and other traditional practices, these youth are themselves less Indigenous (Belanger et al., 2003).

This essentialization of Métis identity can be combatted by including representation of a multitude of ways of being Métis. As discussed earlier, some participants connected deeply to traditions and had grown up and spent a lot of time learning from their family, their communities, and the land. Some had families who were disconnected from these traditions, while others still were more interested in being able to demonstrate themselves and their work in community spaces rather than connecting solely on the basis of Indigeneity. Instead of bringing Métis youth together around experiences that are seen as "traditional," I can continue to work to create spaces that honour and are welcoming to all ways that Métis youth might want to express their culture or connect with one another.

4. Creation of new spaces for Métis youth, instead of adding Métis youth into existing spaces

While participants were clear that they were interested in spaces in which they could participate, two stipulations on those spaces emerged through the interviews. The first was to create these spaces from the ground up and in a way that did not replicate colonial structures. The second

was to be sure that these spaces were being created with intentional inclusion of queer Métis people instead of to meet a diversity quota.

Returning to the federal training program discussed in the context of inclusion of Métis Elders, the participants described difficulties created by this inclusion model. The Indigenous version of the training program that was created contained the same elements as the original program with the addition of Indigenous-specific content, which required program participants to complete more activities in a shorter period of time than the participants in the non-Indigenous version of the training. Even with the addition of more content and cultural activities, others in the non-Indigenous version of the program often perpetuated the idea that the Indigenous version was easier because it was for Indigenous participants. When imagining how the program could have been designed better, the participant said that, instead of just fitting in Indigenous content into a previous program, the program itself should have been designed as a new program, or at least extended so that there was sufficient time to engage in the Indigenous content without feeling rushed.

Other participants cautioned that any inclusion of queer Métis people must be intentional and purposeful and not as a means to achieving a diversity quota. Amber named diversity quotas as one of the main reasons she is not open about her bisexuality in any public spaces. In her career, she is already in very high demand as a biracial Indigenous woman, and she feels that identifying openly as queer would make her the perfect diversity candidate. Amber said "I don't want to say I'm Indigenous and queer, and then suddenly, you know, I'm, like, invited to be on like, 40 fuckin boards, because I check like, all these boxes." When working to include Métis voices in educational spaces, it should be clear why these spaces are being formed and to whose benefit (is it an ask from community members or an attempt to appear more diverse?) before moving ahead with creation. Working to co-create this type of space with Métis youth instead of creating it pre-emptively and inviting them in can ensure that the spaces are wanted and needed. This shift from "product-based forms of pedagogy to a more process-based orientation" (Gustavson, 2007, p. 136) means giving up the perceived control of educational spaces that I hold as an educator, and instead necessitates that I work to center youth ways of knowing and being before the outcome or next steps that might come out of a queer Métis youth space.

Conclusion

This research study focused on the experiences of queer Métis youth. As a Métis researcher, I sought to build relationships with the participants through visiting in an online space and sharing of myself with them as they shared with me. The method of analysis of the transcripts (the voice-centered relational approach) brought me as researcher into relationship with the stories that participants told as well. Through the process of analysis, I found myself uncovering my own narratives that I had not thought of for years and interrogating my memories of being a queer Métis youth. This interrogation, along with the deep and repeated readings of the transcripts of the conversations with the participants, led me to uncover four guideposts. These guideposts were 1) the inclusion of Métis Elders and knowledge keepers, 2) the creation of educational spaces that are physically, spiritually, and emotionally safe, 3) avoidance of the essentialization of Métis identity, and 4) the creation of new spaces for Métis youth, instead of adding Métis youth into existing spaces. I will be holding myself to these guideposts as I continue to develop culturally responsive pedagogies for queer Métis youth. One of the research participants said, "we need to center … the survival and the ability to thrive of our own community at all costs, like full stop." I take this call

to heart and I invite educators to join me in centering the thriving of queer Métis youth within our educational practice.

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