INDIGENOUS REUNIFICATION IN CHILD WELFARE:

A SCOPING REVIEW

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A SCOPING REVIEW

BY TERESA MICHELL

BA, BSW

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In Fulfilment of the Requirements

For the Degree

Master of Society Work

McMaster University

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK **McMaster University**

(2021) **Hamilton, Ontario**

TITLE: **Indigenous Reunification in Child Welfare: A Scoping Review**

AUTHOR: **Teresa Michell, BA, BSW (McMaster University)**

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Bonnie Freeman

NUMBER OF PAGES: 123

ABSTRACT

This thesis looks at the process of reunification for Indigenous children following a time in the care of the child welfare system. To understand what has been studied in the area of reunification of Indigenous children back to their families, a scoping review process is undertaken to gathering and mapping the available research. The initial search produced a total of 1823 abstracts. After applying an inclusion and exclusion reviewing process, the scoping review resulted in a total of 44 literature sources for this study. This study uses Cindy Blackstock's Breath of Life Theory as the theoretical framework to understand and reimagine the process of reunification from the perspective of the child, the family, the worker, and substitute caregiver. The review found support for the idea that research and programs relating to reunification for Indigenous children needs to use Indigenous methods and ways of thinking. Five themes emerged from this review, the use of Indigenous ways of knowing, this theme is central throughout the literature and informs the other four themes: structural vs. individual assessment/intervention, trauma/reconciliation, connections/relationships, and Indigenous research.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work is dedicated to the 215 children found in unmarked graves at the site of the Kamloops residential school, British Columbia in May 2021 and to all the Indigenous children separated from their families through government and child welfare systems. May you all find your way home.

I would like to thank Dr. Bonnie Freeman. Your patience, guidance, and support through this process was exactly what I needed, and I am so very thankful you agreed to take on this project. You encouraged me to follow the process, pushed me when I found myself stuck and always seemed to know the right thing to say!

Thank you to Tara La Rose as a second reader. Your thoughtful questions helped to make this project better.

Thank you to Darlene Savoy at the McMaster School of Social Work. Without you there is no way I would have finished this degree. I am so very grateful.

Thank you to Bill W. and Bo for appearing out of nowhere and providing guidance when I thought I was lost.

Finally thank you to my husband Greg, my children Toby and Adrianna. Thank you for taking this journey with me. With your love and support anything is possible.

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Chapter One:

Introduction

Canadian Child Welfare has a long and painful history as a system that committed acts of immeasurable harm to Indigenous children and families in Canada; this harm is documented by many Indigenous researchers, authors, and individuals (Carriere 2010; Blackstock 2004; 2009; 2019; Sinclair 2007 & 2016; Turpe-Lafond 2013; Toombs et al. 2018). This history includes participation in residential schools, the sixties scoop, and the ongoing over-representation of Indigenous children in child welfare, now known as the millennium scoop (Toombs et al., 2018; Sinclair 2016). Cindy Blackstock argues that the profession of social work and specifically child protection, lost its moral compass and therefore, contributed and participated in the harms of children and families rather than acting within the values of social work (Blackstock 2019, p. 149). The evidence of this harm continues to be present today in the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children involved with the child welfare system (Toombs et al., 2018, p. 408).

This research aims to consider the process of reunification for Indigenous children and families following a child's time in child welfare (foster/kin) care. My initial research was to focus on asking Indigenous families about their experience of the process of reunification by asking questions such as how the family and child were prepared for and supported through this process, how the process occurred (including timeframes), what occurred after the child returned home, what support was received, and how this family experienced this support. In 2019 and 2020, I met with the Six Nations Evaluation Advisory Group, a group involving the staff of Six Nation Social Services, Six Nations Ogwadeni:deo (Child Welfare organization), and ssocial work scholars, to present and discuss my research interests and if it related to the needs of the Six Nations Community. The focus of this advisory group is to develop an Indigenous

evaluation framework that the two Six Nations organizations could implement a cultural evaluative perspective that supports the families and people using the programs and services and is supported by academic research. The advisory group expressed an interest in Reunification for Indigenous Children in Child Welfare, which fits and supports my interests regarding this research topic. Unfortunately, the global pandemic necessitated a change in focus to my original plans of engaging with the Six Nations community. Consulting with the advisory group and my supervisor, the suggestion of conducting a scoping review would be helpful to the advisory group in exploring the literature on Indigenous Reunification in Child Welfare.

The scoping review will be used to identify consistent themes and gaps in the research regarding the reunification for Indigenous children and families. Using Cindy Blackstock's Breath of Life Theory with the scoping review will reimagine how reunification from a cultural perspective may be used with Indigenous children in child welfare.

Going back to the Truth (and Reconciliation)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission began in 2008 to document and educate all Canadians about the history of the Residential School System, the trauma, and its impact on First Nations people. The commission's goals focused on listening, educating, and healing which resulted with the 2015 release of the TRC: Ninety-four Calls to Action to address the legacy of residential schools and to advance the process of reconciliation (TRC 2015). Five of these calls to action directly relate to child welfare:

1. Reduce the number of Indigenous children in care,
2. Collect accurate data relating to Indigenous children and families and their time in care,
3. Provide adequate funding,
4. Culturally appropriate parenting programs for Indigenous families
5. The establishment of Aboriginal child welfare legislation (TRC 2015).

In practice, there seems to be minimal movement toward actual reconciliation in Canada other than events such as the Canadian Federal government's apology in 2017. The focus has been on ensuring "culturally appropriate" services with Indigenous children and families, with efforts being toward specific programs or services labeled "culturally appropriate" (Blackstock 2019, p. 149). Blackstock argues that attention from the real issue is not addressed when Indigenous ways of knowing are so different from those of the Western views that there is no way of providing or measuring effective services to Indigenous children and families within the child welfare system (Blackstock 2019, p. 148).

Further, Blackstock argues that we need to redefine the profession of child protection using the reconciliation process and then expand this to the broader Society to ensure progress (Blackstock 2019, p. 149). This includes identifying "touchstones" or guiding values for work with Indigenous families in child welfare. The values are based on a holistic approach, structural interventions, non-discrimination, self-determination, and the importance of culture and language (Blackstock 2006, p. 10). Because of the profession's direct participation in the genocide of Indigenous people in Canada, all social workers and child protection workers must be responsible as part of the reconciliation process. Not to just ensure that this never happens again but to act in ways to improve the situation and move the work of reconciliation forward (Blackstock 2019, p. 148).

Situating Myself with this Research

I am a white settler, MSW student who has been employed in Child Welfare/Child Protection in Ontario for the past 12 years. Before working in Child Welfare, I worked with adolescents in secure custody (15 years). I live and work on the traditional territories of the

Haudenosaunee and Mississauga of the Credit First Nations and within the lands protected by the "Dish With One Spoon" Wampum agreement. I was born, educated, and raised in this location. This thesis is the fulfillment of a Master of Social Work at McMaster University, and as an active effort toward reconciliation, situated in my position as an ally. Bishop identifies steps to becoming an ally that begins with understanding oppression, its various forms, how it is maintained or perpetuated, and your position within various forms of oppression (Bishop 2002, p. 22). Becoming an effective ally begins with listening and reflecting within the role (Bishop 2002, p. 115). Undertaking this process was challenging as I was raised in a small, predominately white, Christian farming town near the Six Nations Community. The history I learned growing up has very little to do with the reality of child protection, both in this area and the country as a whole. Ongoing listening and reflecting are vital both to the process of this research and in my work within child protection. As a settler working in child welfare with Indigenous families, an ongoing process of reflection is vital in my ability to work with families. This is true for child protection workers on an individual level. However, it is also crucial at a broader systems level, specifically within the reconciliation as committed to by the Canadian government.

Regarding child welfare, I am both an insider and outside as I have worked in the child welfare system for many years but do not have membership in the Indigenous community or child welfare agency in the area. I have been educated and trained in systems that value and prioritize western ideology and ways of thinking. As such, my understanding and application of Indigenous ways of knowing come from an academic versus experiential learning context.

At the beginning of my career, working in secure custody, I saw the same youth return repeatedly, and overwhelmingly, these children were involved with the Child Welfare system.

Many of the issues that led youth in contact with the law and subsequently a stay in secure custody mirrored the structural risks and harms (poverty, generational trauma, substance use, homelessness, etc.) associated with children involved in child welfare and children's mental health system. Research with youth offenders also talks about the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous youth in the youth justice system within Canada (Wiley et al., 2020). Through work in child welfare, I have observed and participated in the process of children returning to their families after a time in care. The reunification process generally consisted of increased visits and contacts over a period of time, based on the family's progress toward identified goals. However, there are no evidence-based reunification or reintegration standards and guidelines to inform the reunification process.

Reunification in Ontario Child Protection

Child protection in Ontario is provincially mandated, and directives come from the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services and delivered under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2017). For child protection in Ontario, decisions are made using the structured decision-making (SDM) model developed by The Children's Research Center in Wisconsin and is called the Differential Response Model in Ontario (Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2016, p. 4). The Differential response model 2016 replaced the previous Ontario Risk Assessment Model (ORAM, 2007). It outlines how decisions are made within child welfare and provides a structure for the documentation of work with families. This model is a manual form with accompanying "tools" used as screening instruments to guide case management decisions and clinical judgement and culturally sensitive practice.

The Ontario Differential Response Model provides a reunification assessment tool that is to guide the worker's decision making with regard to: a) the child returning to the family/caregivers, b) maintaining an out of home placement, and/or c) terminating a goal of reunification and implementing a permanency plan (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). A reunification assessment is comprised of several parts, with each dependent upon the outcome of the prior assessment. This assessment is completed by the Family Service Worker with the family when considering the return of a child to the family. This process is part of the formal case review, which takes place every six months or when the case is being transferred to a new worker. The six-month full case review must include: a reassessment of risk, an assessment of access, an assessment of safety of the home which the child would return to, the reunification or alternate permanent plan, and an assessment of the family and child's strengths and needs (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). Practice recommendations within the manual state that the worker completes this assessment using the information they have gathered from the family, supports, service providers, and the completed assessment is then "shared" with the family (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). The standards do not specifically require the family's direct involvement in creating the plan. However, family input is a consideration when it is shared, and changes are made upon agreement. Individual child welfare workers, supervisors, and agencies interpret and execute these standards in various ways in direct practice with families.

The reunification assessment begins with the completion of the Ontario Family Risk Assessment. The outcome of this assessment must be low or moderate to move on to the next stage of the assessment. If the risk assessment is high or very high, the assessment stops, and reunification is not considered. The second stage of the reunification assessment provides a tool

for evaluating the quality and frequency of access between the child and parents/caregivers. Frequency is defined by the number of actual visits that occurred and is divided by the number of visits available to the family. Access quality is a consideration of direct observations, parent reports, foster/substitute caregiver reports, and child reports. A measure is found on a matrix using factors of quality and frequency to determine a point of the chart provided, which determines the access to be adequate or inadequate. In the case where access is supervised for safety concerns, reunification cannot be considered. Criteria is presented and allows for discretionary override of the outcome based on individual circumstances and is required to be documented with supervisory approval (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). This provision allows for some discretionary input based on a family's individual circumstances.

If the reunification risk level is low or moderate and the access is determined to be acceptable. The worker can proceed to the reunification safety assessment consisting of three sections – protective factors, safety interventions, and safety decisions. Each of the tools are completed and analyzed by the worker and supervisor to decide on the child's return to the family or a move to permanency planning. Workers are encouraged to plan for the child to return home to family and develop alternate permanency plans. If a child is returned to parents/caregivers on short notice, at a minimum, the standards require completion of the reunification safety assessment (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). The Ministry standards do not set out a guide for the process of reunification, how it is to occur, or suggestions for best practices. Therefore, guidelines relating to reunification are generally confined to the assessment and decision-making around safety for the child to return home. Decisions in removing from the child family is based the child's safety. Unfortunately, the trauma in which

the child and family experience as a result of the removal is never addressed by the child welfare workers or the agency.

The Ontario Risk Assessment Manual outlines both standards and "practice notes" that accompany the guidelines indicating recommendations around best practice. Standards are the legislation by Ministry of Children and Youth Services that direct how child protection workers are to conduct their work. Practices notes are guidelines or suggestions to enhance the work by protection workers regarding best practice. Practice notes indicate that a service plan is to be created with the family, using family-centered conferencing and solutions-focused options, as well respecting family culture and uniqueness in developing realistic, clear goals with the family in agreement. Family-centered conferences are recommended at various points of the child's involvement and are included "prior to a child's return home from care" (Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016).

The Child Protection Agency I work for, does not have a specific Reunification Policy that speaks to the 'process of reunification' for children following a time in care. Reunification is discussed only as one of several permanency options. In practice, there is a preference for use of family or kin options when a child cannot remain in the family home this will result with either kin service, kin care, or customary care arrangements. With both kin service and kin care, are formal agreements with the parent's consent and support to place their children with a designated family or with a community member. Whereas customary care agreements are a provision in the legislation that allows for the care of Indigenous children in accordance with the customs of the child's First Nations band or community. Concurrent planning is to occur when the worker is responsible for developing both a plan for reunification and a plan for permanency for the child outside the birth family. This planning is to be geared to the child's age and stage

of development and include the child's wishes. Permanency plans are developed (within three months of admission) and reviewed (at six-month intervals) in mandatory agency conferences.

Child welfare in Ontario uses the Child Protection Information Network (CPIN) to document all work with children and families. This case management system uses documents that generally have a combination of 'check-boxes' and narratives to show compliance with Ministry standards and guide some of the fundamental processes of a family's involvement. Family Service workers complete Outcome Plans with identified goals for work with the family, how the goals are completed, and responsible. These forms include prompts around Ministry standards of things such as reviewing child's rights and responsibilities, as well the voice of the child, etc. The presumption is that once the goals identified are completed, the child is considered no longer at risk, and the file is closed.

Most child welfare agencies offer some in-house programs or community collaborations for quick access to resources such as addiction services, transitional support workers (domestic violence), men's anti-violence, parenting support, and mentoring. The family's involvement in these programs would be dependent on availability, vary on location, and are short-term in duration. The Ministry generally does not provide funds to agencies for prevention programs. The focus remains on identification/reduction of risk to individual children versus structural factors that increase risks for these families. Children and families are referred to community services for ongoing support.

When children are in care, plans of care and plans of service center around goals for what needs to happen for the child to return home and are completed by the Children's Service Worker. Children in care may receive specialized services. Generally, these services are responding to identified concerns about child's developmental issues, mental health, or identified

behaviours. Parents of children in care are referred to either community programs or in-house services which are separate from the support the children are receiving. The family service worker oversees the general process of the file, decision-making, and work with the family. The decision on a child's return to the home is made at the family service worker and supervisor level. It is based on completing the assessment tools outlined above and in line with the plan of service goals. This work is generally done by the individual parent in isolation and is typically separate from the contact that a parent has with their child in care.

Over the last few years, some child protection agencies have begun to improve relationships with Indigenous community partners by providing workers and staff with specific education and training regarding Indigenous people's history and culture. The purpose of taking such an initiative by child protection agencies striving towards the work and action of the recommendations outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action report (2015). In addition, The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies works to link research and practice, providing evidence-based research to inform help inform practice. There are many other optional training opportunities offered to child welfare staff from partnering agencies, community partners, and educational institutions. Also, ongoing training is accessed by workers at their discretion and potentially in consultation with their supervisor.

This scoping review will look at the process of reunification for Indigenous children and families within the context of child welfare. By undertaking a scoping review is a way of taking a first look at what other scholars, researchers and child welfare professionals have learned and recommend about the reunification process for Indigenous children and families. I will begin with an outline of key terms such as reunification, permanency, family and or home. With considering the notion of Indigenous ways of knowing, I will look at their application in child

welfare, specifically relating to the process of reunification. I will then outline the methods used and present an overview of the research located through the scoping review process. The discussion section of this thesis includes a reimagining of reunification for Indigenous children involved with child welfare that considers reunification very differently than the current process described above. I will conclude with recommendations for further research and practice.

Definitions

The following terms used in this review are outlined below as they are defined in the literature.

Reunification

Through the scoping review, different definitions, words, phrases, and concepts of reunification emerged. Toombs et al. define reunification as "placing a child that was previously in out of home care back with their family of origin" (Toombs et al. 2018, p. 409). Similar, language is used in other sources, such as "the process of returning children in temporary out-of-home care to their families of origin" (Landers et al. 2018, p. 347), and "return of children placed in protective care to the home of their birth family (Fernandez 2013, p. 1). Some definitions are very specific such as Jackson 2007, who defines family reunification as the "process of children returning to their parents' full-time care" Jackson 2007, p. 2).

Ankersmit (2016) talks about the prioritized legislation of reunification in Australia by necessitating "active reunification work that is a planned and purposeful process" (p. 273). The priority of reunification is also reflected in American legislation through the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), which states "active versus reasonable efforts" needs to be put toward reunification (Andrews 2002, p. 1). Atwood (2008) describes the use of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). as well the American Safe Families Act (ASFA) to embed reunification in

the permanency process for children in care over any other permanency plans (Atwood 2008, p. 241). Fernandez et al. (2019) states that the evidence shows that most children "return to their families," but findings are inconsistent and vary extensively between studies as these terms (reunification/family) mean so many different things (p. 1376).

Some definitions of reunification were broader, such as Fernadez & Lee, where reunification was defined as "being restored to parents or kin" (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 1376). In some studies, it was explained that children could be placed with extended family members other than those the child was removed from as part of the process of reunification. For the child and immediate family, this process adds to confusion as it is not always clear to who the child returns to. Blackstock found that many children were reunified with parents other than those they were living with when they entered care due to the breakdown and separation of the child's parent's relationship (i.e. Marital or partner separation or divorce) (Blackstock 2009). Some studies refer to reunification "as the process aimed at helping children in out of home care attain optimum level of reconnection with their birth family" (Fernandez et al., 2019, p. 102). Bodor et al. define reunification very broadly as a "coming home," referring to the need for Indigenous adults who were in child welfare care to reconnect as adults to not just their families of origin but also to extended family and communities (Bodor et al. 2009, p. 13). Landers et al. advocate for expanded time frames for reunification outside of the time child welfare is involved to include Indigenous children who were adopted and did not remain in the child welfare system (Landers et al. 2015, p. 19). Costa advocates for reunification as more than a single, one-time event and research that looks at what happens after a child is reunified with their family to ensure support and success (Costa 2016, p. 98). Cocks describes the use of the Family Inclusive Practice to actively increase reunification and use the broad concepts of family and connection to inform

reunification outcomes for children (Cocks 2019, p. 203). Kinship (extended family, community) is also described as a vehicle to aid reunification. It maintains connections between the child and birth family and can assist with the repair of family relationships (Bodor et al. 2009, p. 15).

Permanency.

Often reunification plans are considered in child welfare using the language of "permanency planning." Permanency is viewed in child protection as a placement that provides life-long connections and stability for the child with one family. The agency I work with, reunification is considered part of a larger permanency plan when a child is in care. In some of the literature, concepts of permanency and reunification are embedded in legislation. Atwood (2008) describes the priority of American legislation for workers reunification over other permanency plans for American Indian and Alaskan Native children in care (p.240). Similar language is in use with permanency in Ontario child protection, where reunification is viewed on a continuum of permanency options (Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2016, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Hamilton 2017).

Some research advocates for concepts of permanency as fluid and changing with open concepts of adoption that maintain a child's connections to family and community (Atwood 2008). Some authors note that permanency was used in practice historically as a preference to maintaining a cultural connection for Indigenous children in a system that prioritized adoption and "permanency" over maintaining cultural connections (Barth et al., 2002; Krakouer et al. 2018; Landers et al. 2018).

Family/Home

In Western society, family is generally considered to refer to the nuclear family of parents and children in the same household. Whereas for First Nations communities, the family can include many additional members, including extended family and community members that are significant to the child (Toombs et al. 2018, p. 409). Tam et al., (2017) studied Indigenous concepts of family in Canada by interviewing 15 Indigenous and non-Indigenous people regarding their family ideas. They found that the concepts of immediate family for Indigenous people were dynamic and fluid, incorporating different people at different times in keeping with culture, family needs, social connections, location/mobility, and child-rearing customs (Tam et al., 2017, p. 251). Further, Tam et al. (2017) identified a difference between personal (culture, social connection, location/mobility) perspectives and institutional (defined through legal or demographic terms) perspectives of families (p. 253). Different programs and methods of practice (Family preservation, Family inclusive practice, Family finding) are identified in the research as examples of attempts to use more expansive concepts of family in practice. They are often recommended for work in Indigenous communities (Hill 2005; Cocks 2019; Edmonds & Pepueneza 2018).

With regards to reunification specifically, Bodor et al. (2009) and others advocate for the expansion of definitions of family to include extended family and community members in order to increase reunification opportunities for children in care (Bodor et al. 2009; Cocks 2019; Costa 2016). Further, Krakouer et al. (2018) identify the family as a critical component of cultural connection and "fundamental to Indigenous identity and well-being" (p. 271). Krakouer et al. (2018) recommend that family relationships be prioritized to increase cultural connection and develop reunification opportunities (p. 273).

In terms of research and practice, many Indigenous authors state that the vast difference in the way these concepts are understood make the use of western ideas, theories, interventions not just inadequate but harmful to Indigenous families (Krakouer et al. 2018; Toombs et al. 2018; Blackstock 2019). "With such disparity between non-Indigenous and Indigenous concepts of family, it is unlikely that non-Indigenous policies of reunification adequately reflect First Nations children's needs" (Toombs et al. 2018, p. 409). Western concepts of family in child protection threaten Indigenous family connections and a child's ability to remain connected to family, culture, and community (Krakour et al. 2018, p. 273).

Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that the research around reunification in child welfare is viewed from a lens that considers these very different ideas of both the meaning of family and reunification. Further, when reading the research, it is essential to understand the author's concepts of these terms should any comparison of the information be considered.

Chapter Two:

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this thesis will be based within the frame of Indigenous ways of knowing. This is a conscious choice made to link the material of reunification obtained through the scoping review with the cultural knowledge and practices that is central to lives of Indigenous children and families. Blackstock argues the real issue is that Indigenous ways of knowing are so different from those of the Western views the child welfare system is based on, that there is no way of providing or measuring effective services to Indigenous children and families within this system (Blackstock 2019, p. 148). Further, there is little research regarding outcomes of First Nations families in the child welfare system from an Indigenous perspective (Toombs et al., 2018, p. 409). Therefore, the influence of western academic theories and methods have dominated the research in child protection and history has shown that these benefit Indigenous families very little and are harmful (Krakouer et al. 2018, Toombs et al., 2018, Blackstock 2019) and have led to little authentic statistical information about Indigenous children involved in child welfare. While statistical information only provides a small and limited piece of data to the whole picture or story of what may have happened to many Indigenous children after they entered care (Blackstock & Trocme 2004, p. 9). A further and deeper investigation by talking with and hearing the stories of children, families and communities is needed to provide a clear understanding from an Indigenous perspective of how the processes have had a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of children and families (Blackstock 2009). Blackstock describes the differences between Indigenous and euro-western ways of thinking as follows:

> for Indigenous people, their ancestors were mainly right, versus the tendency in western thought that their ancestors did not know; Indigenous thought centers

> around beliefs that are interdependent versus western theories that tend to break concepts down; concepts of time and space are very expansive (generations) in Indigenous thought versus western theories that tend to focus on one lifespan; and in Indigenous thinking, all relations matter versus western thought that tends to focus on prioritizing human relationships (Blackstock 2019, p. 856).

Blackstock argues for the need to create "ethical space" for the exploration of the experiences of First Nations Children in Child Welfare, including the need for child welfare to begin to rethink some of the basic assumptions embedded in the language and process of the system (Blackstock 2009, p. 230). In doing so, centres and honours Indigenous ways of knowing, doing and being for Indigenous children and families.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

In child welfare practice, Blackstock uses the ideas of Indigenous thinking to talk about how risk is assessed, proposing that optimal child and family functioning is obtained when a limited number of interdependent human constraints are balanced over time (Blackstock 2009, p. 51). Within Indigenous thought, there is an emphasis on relational worldview principles that situate the individual or group in an interconnected universe or world with multi-generational concepts of time (Blackstock 2019). Leduc identifies "all my relations" and "the sacred" as two key concepts that underpin the Aboriginal worldview (Leduc 2018, p. 416). Relationships are moderated between humans, the land, and the universe (including spiritual) to ensure sustainability for all (Blackstock 2019). This way of Indigenous way of thinking acknowledges with gratitude the humble interconnection of humans in relation to the natural world. Which is different from a Western way of thinking which presumes superiority with facts and evidence.

Spirituality, ceremony, and storytelling are vital activities that support the transmission and practice of culture; these practices were interrupted by colonization. Many authors discuss

the concepts of connection, ceremony, and relationship as an integral part of Indigenous culture and worldview that affects all parts of life (Bodor et al., 2009, Dean et al., 2018, LaBoucane-Benson 2009, Landers et al. 2018, Wickham 2008). Therefore, ceremonies are vital today for the education and transmission of culture, as well as a decolonizing process toward reclaiming culture and identity (LaBoucane-Benson 2009).

Concepts of strength, healing, and resiliency are central to Indigenous ways of thinking and consistently found within the literature in Indigenous child welfare (Bodor et al. 2009, LaBoucane-Benson, Deane, et al., 2018). Strength-based, resilience, and healing were common recommendations for programs and services with Indigenous families in child welfare in general, and specifically around reunification. This focus on strength and resilience contrasts with the general focus in western thinking and research that focuses on deficits and individual pathology (Toombs et al., 2019).

Indigenous ways of knowing also speak to equity as a way to ensure balance over time. Moreover, equity it is "achieved through the deliberate and thoughtful actions made by people who see their survival as co-dependant with all others across generations and the universe" (Blackstock 2019, p. 858).

Blackstock argues for child welfare to think of child safety and well-being on a time continuum to capture change and for workers to look more broadly at risk within a context of relationships, connections, families, and communities (Blackstock 2009, p. 230). Issues such as substance use, poverty, and homelessness are identified as complex consequences of colonialism yet continue to be concerns that child welfare addresses individually with families rather than at the systemic level. Many authors (Blackstock & Trocme 2004; Blackstock 2009; 2019) have identify Indigenous children generally entering care for issues that are considered structural or

outside of the family (poverty, substance use, homelessness) however in contrast, interventions only focus primarily on the child and do not address broader structural issues that is impacting the family as a whole. Blackstock argues that child welfare needs to expand its scope to systematically include structure risks, cultural influences, and changes over time to attempt to meet the needs of Indigenous families (Blackstock 2009, p. 229). These structural issues (poverty, substance use, homelessness) are identified as some of the most important factors affecting the overrepresentation of First Nations children in child welfare due to their links to colonialism (Blackstok & Trocme 2004). Further, the research also indicates that these same structural factors limit the options, opportunities, and process toward reunification for First Nations children (Blackstock 2019).

In applying Indigenous ways of knowing in child welfare, Blackstock found support for the theoretical assumptions that interconnected realities matter in decision making within child welfare. Specifically, that time matters for Indigenous children when assessing child well-being and that the impact of child welfare decisions are felt both within this generation and future generations (Blackstock 2009, p. 50). The Breath of Life Theory is introduced as an "invitation to explore how Indigenous beliefs of interconnection, balance and time can shape the way we construct and apply" theory and practice in child welfare (Blackstock 2019, p. 857). In this next section, the Breath of Life theory will be explored further and its potential for application in child welfare specifically in relation to the process of reunification.

Breath of Life Theory (BOL)

Blackstock's Breath of Life (BOL) theory (2019) is described as: human beings are indivisible from the earth, the universe and from human existence across time; where balance is

not static, but rather a function of the overall balance achieved among constantly changing relational worldview principals shaped by culture and context (p. 857).

Within this perspective each individual person is viewed within an interconnected world and in multi-generational concepts of time (Blackstock 2019, p. 857). Below Blackstock (2009) highlights four relational worldview as important considerations for work with Indigenous children and families.

> *The four relational worldview areas are identified as:*
>
> Physical (land, water, air, food, shelter)
> Emotional (belonging, attachment to family and community)
> Spiritual (spirituality and life purpose)
> Cognitive (self and community actualization, identity, service, (Blackstock 2009, p. 857)

The principles of the four relational worldviews are interdependent and constantly changing such that optimal functioning is found when the balance is achieved among all the dimensions across time (Blackstock 2019, p. 857). Context and culture are central to this theory and provide different manifestations in distinct communities. However, through all the relational worldview principles, ancestral knowledge is considered and integrated (Blackstock 2019, p. 857). Blackstock initially introduced the Breath of Life theory in 2009 and revisited this theory again in 2019 to support Indigenous families and community's ways of knowing. Blackstock found that this theory remained applicable not only in the area of research, more importantly in the practice and understanding of Indigenous families and how they integrate their cultural knowledge and practice with their lives (Blackstock 2019, p. 858). In understanding Blackstock's Breath of Life theory (2019) provides child protection workers and agencies with an insight to what is central and important to Indigenous families, particularly with their children and their wellbeing.

The next section will highlight the methods in which this scoping review research undertook with this thesis. Scoping reviews are important because this type of research seeks to extract data with without bias or opinion. Therefore, by using an open search criterion I will be able to gather information that could be valuable to protection workers working with Indigenous families without my misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the information that is presented in the documents.

Chapter Three:

Methods

The objective of this scoping review is to review the research relating to Indigenous Reunification in child welfare. Specifically, I am interested in what the research says about the process of Reunification for Indigenous children and families; how the reunification event was planned for, experienced, and supported by the children and families involved. This research question results from several changes, iterations, and discussions with my thesis supervisor and the Six Nations Evaluation Advisory Group in 2019/2020. The community of Six Nations assumed responsibility for all child protection services for Six Nations families through Ogwadeni:deo (Taking Care of Our Own), as well prevention services through Six Nations Social Services. The Evaluation Advisory Group sought to understand programs and services that are effective in the Indigenous community and supported by academic research. The advisory group expressed an interest in Reunification for Indigenous Children in Child Welfare which fits with my own interests. Initially, this research hoped to interview families about their specific experience of the reunification process. However, due to the global pandemic, this topic necessitated a change in focus, and a scoping review was chosen.

A scoping review, as outlined by Arksey & O'Malley (2003) aims to "rapidly map key concepts in a research area" (p. 21). Peters et al. (2015) identify scoping reviews to clarify working definitions and conceptual boundaries of a topic; identify research findings, gaps in the research; and to make recommendations for future research (p. 140). Scoping reviews look at the types of evidence or information available in a particular area of interest, concentrating on presenting a breadth of information rather than an in-depth study of the area of interest (Arksey

& O'Malley 2003, p. 21). The goal is to determine the range of available evidence and map this in a helpful way (Peters et al., 2015, p. 142).

Arksey & O'Malley also discuss the addition of a consultation exercise to the Scoping Review process to ensure that the research fits with community needs (Arksey & O'Malley 2003, P. 28). Seeking consultation with the Six Nations Evaluation Advisory Group is an example of such a consultation exercise. It has informed both the research question and focus of this project. This review could be useful to both identify needs for future research and identify ideas, programs, or information that may be of value relating to the reunification of Indigenous children from child welfare.

Research Question:

What is Indigenous Reunification in Child Welfare?
- How is this process/event planned for?
- How is this process/event experienced by those involved?
- How long did it take for the family to adjust?
- How is this process supported and maintained?

Searching:

The scoping review is used to present a map of relevant existing literature through a search of electronic databases, reference lists, grey literature, organization literature, conferences, etc. (Arksey & O'Malley P. 21). A three-step method is presented by Micah et al., beginning with an initial limited search of relevant databases including an analysis of text words in the title and abstract; a search using all keywords and terms across all databases; and thirdly, a review of reference lists (Micah et al. 2015, p. 144).

The following keywords were used in various combinations for title/text searching:

Indigenous or Aboriginal or First Nation or Native or Indian (and)
Child Welfare or Child Protection or Out of Home care (and)
Reunification or reintegration or reunify or return home or reunion or reconciliation

These terms were chosen through discussion with my supervisor and library research support services to reflect terms that would best capture information from both a global and local context. The term First Nation is very commonly used in Canada, whereas terms such as Indian or Aboriginal are more commonly found in the literature from the United States and Australia. The terms child welfare and child protection are commonly to refer to government care in Canada and the United States, and Out of Home care is more commonly used in Australia. Through the search process, I added terms such as "return home" and "reconciliation" as I found they were often present in my searches and could lead to broader results.

Through this project, my supervisor was involved in a separate project relating to programs and services for Indigenous families, using a program called Distiller that was used to search the literature relating to Indigenous children and families, child welfare, and well-being. In September 2020, this program retrieved 13, 447 abstract citations under the question: Is this citation about Indigenous children and families or Indigenous children? The citations were further screened by title under the areas: focus on Indigenous delivered programs and services, services related to child and family well-being, and programs or services delivered in an Indigenous community. This screening led to a total of 1823 abstract citations remaining. For this scoping review and my master's research, I reviewed the remaining 1823 citations, searching title and abstract using the search terms and combinations identified above. During my search with Distiller, I found a total of seven records relating to reunification (see chart below) for a full-text review. Many of records collected were subsequently located in the following search tool known as Discovery. Discovery is a multi-disciplinary search tool that searches the library

catalogue and the content of all available databases) with the exception of one older article (Metcalf 1979), two theses projects that were chosen for inclusion (Wickham 2008, Starr 2016). One thesis, Shantz 2010, "The Foundation of our community: cultural restoration reclaiming children and youth in an Indigenous community" was ultimately excluded because it did not speak to the reunification of Indigenous children specifically in child welfare care

In consultation with McMaster University library services, search terms were determined to best fit with this topic and a broad specific search process was undertaken to ensure the search captured all available resources. Discovery includes a broad spectrum of databases, including but were not limited to EBSCOhost, Google Scholar, JSTOR, ProQuest, Scholars Portal, and Web of Sciences. The search for literature started in October and finished in December 2020; no search limits were placed on the date or geographical location to gather as much relevant information as possible. This search resulted in sixty-two articles for full-text review. I also used another search tool known as DistillerSR to which majority of the articles for this research were located. DistillerSR is a data extraction tool that is used for literature reviews and evidence-based research. This tool is currently being used by my supervisor working with the Six Nations Evaluation Advisory team in conducting a scoping review on the wellbeing of children and family in child welfare.

Some articles were difficult to locate in print form, specifically older articles (Metcalf 1979, Jackson 2007), a thesis project (Wickham 2008), and one article located in the DistillerSR search above (Shantz 2010). Library services assisted in retrieving these documents for this research project. The data management program Zotero was also used to contain and manage the selected resources, and a journal was kept through the search process to ensure completion of all

search steps. The following chart below organizes the literature that was extracted to be considered for the scoping review for this research:

Search results are captured in the following chart:

DistillerSR	Broad Discovery/database Search	
1823 articles reviewed by abstract and title for the following terms: Indigenous/Aboriginal/First Nation Native/Indian Reunification/return home/reunify reconciliation Child Welfare/Protection	Indigenous Reunification Child welfare	42
	Indigenous Reunification Child protection	16
	Indigenous Reunify Child protection/welfare	0
	Aboriginal Reunification Child protection	9
Seven articles pulled for full-text review (Duplicates with Discovery search removed)	Aboriginal Reunification Child welfare	18
	First Nations Reunification Child protection	20
	First Nations Reunification Child welfare	24
	Aboriginal Return home Child welfare	27
	Aboriginal Return home Child protection	31
	Indigenous Return home Child welfare	73
	Indigenous Return home Child protection	64
	Exclusions: Duplicates were removed. Due to the similarity in some of the search terms, many duplicates were found through each search.	

	Further exclusions were made based on articles that did not specifically mention all three search terms in the title and abstract.
Full-Text Review **Exclusions:** A full-text review was completed for seven articles once duplicates were removed. Articles were excluded if they did not provide a specific reference to each of the three areas covered in the search terms. As for inclusion, each article required a reference to some return home or reunification for Indigenous or Aboriginal families in the context of child protection. All articles that provided reference to each of the three areas were included in this review. Three articles remain for inclusion	**Full-Text Review** **Exclusions:** A full-text review was completed of 62 articles, duplicates removed. Articles were excluded if they did not provide a specific reference to each of the three areas covered in the search terms. As for inclusion, each article required a reference to some return home or reunification for Indigenous or Aboriginal families in the context of child protection. All articles that provided reference to each of the three areas were included in this review. 41 articles remain for inclusion

Upon completing the DistillerSR and Discovery searches, duplicates were removed, providing a total of 44 results for inclusion in the scoping review.

A focused search was then completed of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society and the First Nations Knowledge Portal. Consistent search terms were used as above, and records were reviewed by title and abstract. The search process is reflected in the following chart below:

Search term	Results found
reunification	1 reviewed and kept as the title mentions all three search term areas – John (2105) Indigenous resilience, connectedness, and reunification – from root causes to root solutions: A report on Indigenous child welfare in British Columbia. This result was also located through the Discovery search captured above.
return	9 reviewed by title/abstract – all 9 were excluded. Some contained keywords of interest, but didn't focus on children's reunification, for example Alcoze & Mawhiney, Returning Home: A report on Community-Based Native Human Services Project, 2010 talks about returning home. However, this is about

	the creation of a new curriculum to identify knowledge and skills social workers should have to work effectively with Indigenous people, not about child welfare.
Child welfare/protection reunification	1 (duplicate captured above)
Indigenous	80 reviewed – I kept (duplicate captured above). The remaining articles were excluded as they discussed child welfare or child protection but did not mention reunification or returning home – such as Displaced: Indigenous Youth and the child welfare system, 2020.

Reference lists were reviewed for each of the articles pulled for full-text review. All articles identified in the reference lists were previously captured through the above searches.

The scoping review process uncovered approximately 1823 articles, through the process of inclusion and exclusion criteria I was able to reduce the number of articles for this research project to a total of 41 articles. By maintaining very open search criteria, I was able to gather information that could be valuable to Indigenous families that may not be reflected in traditional peer reviewed documents. In using my research questions along with Blackstock's Breath of Life theory (2009; 2019) which centres Indigenous knowledge, I will show in my analysis the importance of the reunification from an Indigenous perspective for Indigenous children in child welfare. The next section will show the process with of including and excluding literature in scoping review.

Inclusions/exclusions

Articles were included based on the presence of the search terms in the title and/or abstract and if the information in the title and abstract indicated a focus on both reunification and Indigenous families within the context of child protection. Articles were eliminated that did not provide a specific reference to both reunification (reunify, return home) and Indigenous (Aboriginal, Indian) within the context of child protection (child welfare, out of home care). One article, Fidler 2018, "In Limbo, Exploring Income and Housing Barriers for Reunifying Tasmanian Families" specifically stated that their results should not be interpreted as containing a specific Indigenous voice, as they used a case study of compiled family information designed to provide a broad overview of parents' challenges. This case study identified themes from interviews with workers and families experiencing reunification. This article was chosen for inclusion regardless of this lack of specific Indigenous voice as it is located in Australia where there is a large Indigenous population with similar child welfare history, and the information provides valuable insight with regard to reunification.

Most articles removed at the initial stages (title & abstract review) referenced reunification but did not provide specific information relating to Indigenous children or families (Chambers et al. 2018; Ainsworth & Maluccio 2008; Klein 1997). Some articles focused on reunification in the context of Immigration (Zug 2011) or youth justice (Shantz 2010) versus child protection. Articles were excluded that discussed a child welfare experience for Indigenous children and families, with a focus other than reunification, such as Hill 2016, that discusses the role of grandmothers assuming care of their grandchildren to avoid child welfare involvement. This article examined how grandparents took on the care of their grandchildren without the involvement of child welfare. Because this research did not involve the child welfare system it

did not specifically speak to the ways of reunification back to the immediate family. Further exclusions were based on articles that referenced reunification following private adoption or other means but did not include reunification following involvement in child protection or child welfare (D'Andrade 2009). A large volume of research was found relating to reunification from child welfare or out of home care. However, very few of these resources specified the Indigenous experience (Chambers et al., 2018; Klein 1997; Carvalho et al., 2018; Maltais 2019). In fact, many studies mentioned race as a variable but often provided little information or context beyond the statement of race (Landers et al. 2019; Delfabbro et al., 2014). A full-text review was completed for 18 articles located through the distiller search and three articles chosen for inclusion in the review.

Overview

In total, 44 articles were included in this scoping review. The articles discussed research that was focused in Australia, Canada, and the United States. These countries share similarities to their historical treatment of Indigenous people, specifically in the context of child welfare (Landers et al., 2016; Chewka 2009). Through my analysis of the articles, I determined, collated and charted the articles into the 8 categories: Predictors, Process, Program Evaluation, Policy/Legislative, Experience/Impact, Literature review, Comparative studies. These categories or themes were based on my thematic analysis as described by Braun & Clarke (2006) which relates to the researcher's analytic interest in answering their research question. This method provides a less rich description of the data overall and gives a more detailed analysis of the specific aspect of the data that the researcher is interested in (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Summary of results (see Appendix)

I begin with a description of the articles chosen for review. Of the forty-four results, majority of articles (13) discuss predictors or indicators that lead to reunification (Fernandez & Lee 2013; Delfabbro et al. 2014; Fernandez et al. 2019; Doab et al. 2015; Esposito et al. 2014; Landers et al. 2017; Landers et al. 2015; Fidler 2018; Delfabbro et al. 2003; Farmer et al. 2009; Delfabbro et al. 2013; Landers et al. 2019; Delfabbro et al. 2008). Such predictors and indicators include demographics, as well physical harm, violence, etc. will determine whether a child is kept in care or returned to the home. I noticed that the articles that discussed predictors or indicators generally attempt to identify variables, factors, or characteristics that are consistent with and could predict which children would return to their families (such as on time abuse, such physical discipline) and which characteristics, factors, or variables are consistent for those children who remain in care and do not reunify with their families (such as neglect which would include substance abuse, homelessness, deficiencies in parenting) (Fernandez & Lee 2013; Doab et al. 2015).

Ten of the articles found were categorized as "experiential" (Adam et al. 2017; Rule & Rice 2015; Landers et al. 2018; Jackson 2007; Starr 2016; Toombs et al. 2018; Mendes et al., 2016; Wickham 2008; Jackson & McConachy 2014; Edmonds & Pequeneza 2018). These articles are generally qualitative and interviewed Indigenous adults who have had some experience within the child welfare/protection system (Adam et al. 2017; Rule & Rice 2015; Toombs et al., 2018). Some studies of the studies reflect interviews with caseworkers and staff or administrators in programs or services for Indigenous families reunifying (Jackson 2007; Jackson & McConachy 2014).

Nine articles found are classified within the "legislative or policy" category (Atwood 2008; Andrews 2002; Barth et al. 2002; Limb et al. 2004; Hill 2005; Cocks 2019; John 2016; Commissioner for Children and Young People Victoria 2016; Krakour et al. 2018). Articles of this nature focus on describing and analyzing specific legislation in relevant geographical/jurisdictional areas (i.e. small urban areas vs metropolitans) (Andrews 2002; Atwood 2008). These articles generally reflect a qualitative approach and provide an evaluation of the effectiveness of the identified legislation or policy (Andrews 2002; Barth et al. 2002).

Four articles looked at the evaluation of a particular program or service designed to meet the needs of Indigenous children or families within the child welfare system, as they reunify with their families (Bodor et al. 2009; Metcalf 1979; Dean et al. 2018; LaBoucane-Benson 2009). These generally attempt to evaluate the capacity of a particular intervention to meet the needs of reunifying Indigenous families and include recommendations for specific Indigenous services (Bodor et al., 2009; Metcalf 1979).

This scoping review yielded three articles focused on the review of literature relating to Indigenous reunification in research (Costa 2016; Landers et al. 2016; Chewka 2009). Geographically, one literature review was completed in Canada, one in Australia and one in the United States. The Canadian literature review was completed in 2009; whereas the other two literature reviews are more recent (2016).

Two articles included in the review presented an Indigenous Theory or ontology that has been connected to or applied in child welfare (Blackstock 2009; Toombs et al. 2019). For example, Blackstock's application of the Breath of Life theory is on such theoretical treatment that is used to undertake an assessment of structural risk in child welfare and how this relates to reunification for Indigenous people. Toombs et al. (2019) re-analyzed a prior qualitative study of

Indigenous reunification, using Indigenous relational worldview principles to reframe the results to generally fit an Indigenous community.

Two articles were included that specified and covered the actual process of reunification, and how it was experienced by Indigenous families (Fernandez 2013; Ankersmit 2016). A further two articles were included that attempted to look at the reunification experience of Indigenous children compared to the experience of non-Indigenous children (Landers 2016; Blackstock 2009).

The next section will discuss the areas in which the articles are categorized. The categories were chosen to help focus the information on the process of reunification and the specific family's experience.

Predictors:

Of the forty-four resources identified, the majority (13) fits within the category I have labeled Predictors (Doab et al. 2015; Landers et al. 2017; Delfabbro et al. 2003; Farmer et al. 2009; Landers et al. 2019; Delfabbro et al. 2013; Fernandez & Lee 2013; Delfabbro et al. 2014; Esposito et al. 2014; Delfabbro et al. 2019; Landers et al. 2007; Fidler 2018; Delfabbro et al. 2008). Predictive studies are generally mixed methods, including qualitative and quantitative approaches, and tend to be specific to a particular geographic area (Canada, United States, and Australia). These studies attempt to identify variables, factors, or characteristics that are consistent with or could indicate or predict which children return to their families and which characteristics, factors, or variables are consistent for those children who remain in care and do not reunify with their families (Esposito et al. 2014; Farmer et al. 2009; Doab et al. 2015; Delfabbro et al. 2014). Some studies looked at individual factors and characteristics present for those children that reunified and could potentially contribute to reunification (Delfabbro 2008).

Others focused on the systemic factors contributing to reunification (Fernandez et al., 2019; Fidler 2018).

There is limited ability to compare these studies with one another, as they are from different areas, sometimes with a very different history, legislation, ideologies, systems, programs, and services. Many studies use different definitions, terms, phrases, and variables with which they gather and present information. Each area collects different types of data, and what is collected has changed over time. The term Indigenous in the literature is used to describe descendants of the First People in that area. However, there is much diversity of tradition, culture, child-rearing practices, and definitions of family between nations, tribes, and clans. Further, many terms used to refer to reunification as reunify, return, return home and many ideas around what reunification itself is to family and the community.

Most of the articles in the "Predictors" category are from Australia, however geographical differences are noted in the legislation, policy, and programs specific to that area. Similar to Canada, Australia provinces identified in having different legislation and policies that govern child protection and various types of programs and services to meet the needs of those families involved with child protection. Most studies use a narrower definition of reunification, such as those children who return home during or following a time in care, within a specific time frame or under a specific set of circumstances (Delfabbro et al.; 2014, Esposito et al. 2014). Landers et. al. (2015) in contrast used a more expansive definition of reunification, where reunification is an "ongoing, life-long process of community and connection that is deeply connected to culture and identity" (p.347).

Experiential/impact

Articles in this category (10) are all qualitative studies that asked Indigenous adults about their experience of reunification following a time in care (Adam et al. 2017; Rule & Rice 2015; Landers et al. 2018; Jackson 2007; Starr 2016; Toombs et al. 2018; Mendes 2016; Wickham 2008; Jackson & McConachy 2014; Edmonds & Pequeneza 2018). Some studies interviewed case workers or caregivers about their experiences, thoughts, and ideas regarding the reunification process and available resources to support reunification (Mendes 2016; Jackson 2007). Five of the ten articles in this category focused on Australian contexts, four presented Canada context, and one article presented as United States based study.

Each of these articles share direct quotes from prior service users regarding their experiences of reunifying. All stories describe the impact of trauma, including experiences of post-traumatic stress, loss of culture, impact on self-esteem, loss of identity, and connection (Adam et al. 2017; Landers et al.; 2018; Jackson 2007; Starr 2016). All articles make recommendations for policy to address the identified issues.

In describing their experiences, many participants identified the importance of social connection to their community and culture describing these as a source of positive self-identity and positive self-esteem (Landers et al. 2018; Adams et al., 2017; Wickham 2008). Most of these articles discuss reunification as a much broader concept in the Indigenous community, calling for reunification for all Indigenous people separated from their communities through colonial policies and procedures (Wickham 2008; Rule & Rice 2015; Starr 2016).

The definition of "family" is used very broadly in these articles, reunification considers not just the individual's immediate biological family but also to their extended family, clan, and community (Adam et al., 2017; Tombs et al. 2018). These concepts fit with traditional family

and child-rearing practices in the Indigenous community, where child-rearing was the responsibility shared in the community (Blackstock 2009).

Legislative/Policy

The scoping review explicated nine articles describing legislation or policy relating to Indigenous reunification in a particular geographical location (Atwood 2008; Andrews 2002; Barth et al. 2002; Limb et al. 2004; Hill 2005; Cocks 2019; John 2016; Commissioner for Children and Young People Victoria 2016; Krakouer et al. 2018). Five of these articles focus on studies from the United States, three from Australia, and one from Canada which described important legislative changes within the child welfare system that generally attempted (in the specific country) to address identified services relating to Indigenous families. Some studies evaluate the ability of a particular law or policy to address the identified issue, an example of this is in Australian legislation that directs children protection workers with "active efforts toward reunification" with specific tasks must be completed before the courts consider a permanent plan of care or terminating custody rights of the parent (Andrews 2002; Barth et al. 2002; Commissioner for Children & Youth Australia 2016). Some of these articles look at case workers' compliance with the legislation, rather than considering whether the legislation itself adequately addressed the issue it was put in place to address (Limb et al. 2004).

Program Evaluation:

The scoping review identified four studies describing analysis of a specific program or intervention around reunification with Indigenous families (Bodor et al. 2009; Metcalf 1979; Deane et al. 2018; LaBoucane-Benson 2009). Three of these articles are from Canada and one is from the United States. One article outlined a one-time event where 60 Indigenous children in care were brought to their home community for a day of celebration, connection, and ceremony

(Bodor et al. 2009). The first Canadian study looked at the "LIFE" program in Manitoba, where parents were fostered with their children. This program used existing foster care funding (Deane et al. 2018) and involved foster parents to live and work with mothers and their children in the same home together. The second Canadian study focused on the "In Search of your Warrior Program," which examined Indigenous methods to understand and create a framework for Indigenous family resilience through ceremony, connection, and relationships (LaBoucane-Benson 2009). These programs were based on traditional Indigenous teachings and advocate for the use of Indigenous methods versus western methods in programs for Indigenous families (Bodor et al. 2009; Metcalf 1979; Deane et al. 2018; LaBoucane-Benson 2009).

Literature review

A total of 3 literature reviews were found through this scoping review process (Costa 2016; Landers et al. 2016; Chewka 2009). Literature reviews identify the relevant and available research in a particular topic relating to Indigenous reunification. The purpose of these reviews was to allow the identification of themes in the research, as well gaps identified for future research. Geographically, these studies were conducted in Canada, Australia, and the United States. The United States study looked at the case level predictors (i.e. types of reasons the referral was based upon, either neglect or abuse) found in the literature over the last 15 years that supported decisions around reunification (Landers et al., 2016). The Canadian study took a very broad definition of reunification, using the term repatriation and seeing this as a lifelong need, not just immediately following a time in care, but over a lifetime (Chewka 2009). A broad definition of family is also used in this article, which includes extended family members, clan and community to provide increased options for reunification (Chewka 2009). Further, barriers Indigenous adults found toward their reunification later in life are presented, with

recommendations toward an acknowledgement of past harms, and the need for both increased funding and research toward a clear framework of repatriation for all Indigenous people (Chewka 2009).

Theoretical

Two articles including in this scoping review are categorized as 'theoretical' as they discuss different theoretical perspectives around reunification in child welfare (Blackstock 2009, Toombs et al 2019). These articles argue for the need to use Indigenous knowledge rather than Western theory and ways of thinking to understand and identify what is being researched and the creation and implementation of services for Indigenous families (Blackstock 2009; Toombs et al. 2019). These two articles provide direct examples of the application of Indigenous ways of knowing in child welfare and specifically mention reunification.

Comparative

This scoping review yielded only two studies that attempted to compare Indigenous children experiences with the reunification of Caucasian and African American children (Blackstock 2009; Landers 2016). The one study located in the United States, focused on government data, and used this to compare the behavioural problems of Indigenous children in care with the behavioural problems of Caucasian and African American children involved in care (Landers 2016). The study attempted to see if race was a predictor of reunification. However, this study indicated that race was not a significant factor in predicting reunification within child welfare (Landers 2016).

The Canadian study looked at the characteristics of those children who reunified in First Nations and Non-First Nations children within the child protection system in the province of Nova Scotia (Blackstock 2009). This study which considered services to families between 2003

and 2005, found that First Nations children in Nova Scotia were 3.4-6 times more likely to be removed from their family than non-First Nations children (Blackstock 2009). In terms of reunification, this study found that there is little research available regarding Indigenous children's experience after they enter care. The study also found that impoverished families living in inadequate housing were overrepresented among those who have their children removed (Blackstock 2009). This study describes a substantial difference in the accessibility and availability of services provided to First Nations families when compared to families from other identity communities (Blackstock 2009). The chronic and ongoing differences and limiting funding serve to perpetuate the ongoing overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care through a lack of services (Blackstock 2009).

Process:

Two studies presented in the scoping review focus on the actual process of reunification and describe how decisions were made by case workers and how these were experienced by families, care providers, and workers (Fernandez 2013; Ankersmit 2016). Both articles present studies of mixed methods combining the use of readily available government data and qualitative interviews with caseworkers, children, and families involved in child protection. In these articles, the process is generally described as the factors that influence the likelihood that a child will reunify with their family through the child welfare process (Fernandez 2013; Ankersmit 2016). Interviews with caseworkers identified factors that influence collaboration between families and case workers, such as trust, motivation, willingness, knowledge, and agreement (Fernandez 2013; Ankersmit 2016). Strategies to promote collaboration were also identified as collaboration and were seen as a key factor in reunifying children to their families (Ankersmit 2016). Themes are identified to inform policy and practice. These articles indicate that there is

not a lot of research available regarding the specific process of reunification for Indigenous families (Fernandez 2013; Ankersmit 2016).

Experiential/Impact

In this category, although only two of the articles explicitly stated a focus on reunification, valuable information regarding how the process of reunification experienced can be found. (Adam et al. 2017; Landers et al.; 2018, Jackson 2007). Although the primary focus was the experience itself and covered areas other than the reunification event, valuable information about the process was identified and discussed. The program/evaluation category (Boder et al. 2009; Deane et al., 2018; Metcalf 1979; LaBoucane-Benson 2009), regarding the process of reunification is described in the articles as a reunification component of programs or events that involve families in child welfare. The focus of this approach was to evaluate the effectiveness of a specific program generally focused on reunification and describe the process or event. All the articles included consistent themes for consideration regarding the process of reunification which will be discussed in the following section.

Ideally, Indigenous children would not enter alternate care. Instead of child protection services individually focusing primarily on the child, the child welfare system would focus broadly on addressing structural and systemic factors (poverty, substance use, trauma, mental health) and provide assistance with resources such as financial, coaching, education, etc. in order that children do not enter care. Therefore, families would remain intact in the community when struggles are identified. Programs and services would focus on prevention and well-being, on understanding historical trauma, and work from a strength-based, and respectful approach. However, the current child welfare system is a long way from this picture. Historically more Indigenous children were taken into child welfare care (Toombs et al 2018; Fernandez et al

2013), and there continues to be an overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care (Rule & Rice 2015; Blackstock 2009). Reunification knowledge and research, specifically for Indigenous children and families is limited, despite evidence that most children are eventually reunited with their birth parents in some fashion (Fernandez & Lee 2013, p. 1374). This makes the concept and the process of reunification vitally important for Indigenous children and families. The next section will examine the themes that evolved from literature analysis.

Chapter Four:

Themes

The articles selected for the scoping review were subsequently reviewed using the process of thematic analysis, which is outlined as a method for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke 2017, 2006). Braun & Clarke describe a process that is interactive, organic, flexible, and geared to summarizing the data and identifying and interpret important information (Braun & Clarke 2017).

Manual coding was used to analyze the articles included in this scoping review. This process included reviewing each article in the context of the study questions for words, phrases and ideas noted in the research questions. When these were found they were highlighted on the physical copy of the articles. Common themes were identified from these words and phrases. Themes are described as a "pattern that captures something significant or interesting about the data question" (Maguire & Delahunt 2017, p. 3356). The articles were then reviewed specifically, looking for the identified words and phrases to ensure that all the themes were applicable and captured (Clarke & Braun 2006). The themes were then added to the overall article chart (See Appendix).

The one consistent theme reflected throughout this analysis, was the use of *Indigenous ways of knowing* as way of making sense of and understanding the process of reunification for Indigenous families. This theme also informs the other four themes (structural vs. individual assessment/intervention, trauma/reconciliation, and connections/relationships and Indigenous research) that will be discussed in this analysis of the process of reunification for Indigenous children. I argue that this analysis is both a starting point and an overarching consideration through each stage of the process.

1. Indigenous ways of knowing

As outlined earlier, Blackstock identifies the divergence that exist between Indigenous ways of knowing and Western ideals as making the application of Western approaches with Indigenous children and families a harmful undertaking (Blackstock 2019). The use of Euro-western ideas to inform child protection practice have and continue to cause harm. While child welfare and child protection continue to use these approaches and expect different outcomes. The literature argues that reunification cannot be understood or adequately used with Indigenous children and families without incorporating Indigenous knowledges and practices.

Indigenous thought is emphasized on the relational worldview principles that situate the individual in an interconnected world with "generational concepts of time" (Blackstock 2019). Therefore, using an Indigenous worldview within a context that considers the need for reunification beyond a child's specific time in child welfare care. Further, the history of colonization, residential schools, and child welfare's involvement in this history has led to many varied experiences of "in care" and "reunification" for Indigenous children and adults. It is important that both specific history and the context of what happen in that history need to both be considered and used to specifically frame the care and reunification of Indigenous children (Chewka 2009).

All consideration of planning for reunification for Indigenous families, needs to capture these many varied experiences. Landers et al (2015) advocates for the use of an expansive definition of reunification that is a: lifelong and ongoing process of connection and contact with family and community and is deeply connected to culture and identity. Furthermore, the authors state: "Going home in this context is not just a one-time event, or a formal permanent move back

to a specific family home, but can be visits, participation in ceremony and informal contacts" (Chewka 2009, P. 33).

An Indigenous worldview focuses on self-determination, respect, dignity, family, and community where connections and relationships between family members are maintained and strengthened. There is a focus on the collective versus the individual, sharing of resources and opportunities for all, family members (immediate and extended) ensure to each other that they have the emotional, social, spiritual, and financial resources needed to support the family. An important principle with Indigenous worldview shows the child at the centre of the family, community, and nation where they are valued and protected in carrying forward Indigenous knowledge and practices (Blackstock, 2009, p. 7). In child protection practice, the focus ideally is around prevention and support, however because of legislation and policies child protection worker roles become policing or regulating these polices with Indigenous families. If an Indigenous perspective or worldview were considered, children would not enter care, and the community would care for itself using traditional systems and processes.

Historically, Child welfare was set up as an adversarial system where families hold much less power than workers. Ideally, parents would not just participate in, but rather direct the child's in-care plan and reunification. Cooperation would be paramount in alternate care arrangements such as kin care, kin service, and customary care. The focus would be on cooperation, respect, and dignity, allowing parents to resume their role as primary caregiver to the child. There would be a focus on culture and culturally specific activities and resources that support the family and their needs. Simply returning a child to the family home is not enough (Chewka 2009, p. 31). Child protection need to consider support a shared responsibility between families and their community that strengthens connections of culture and identity.

Indigenous thinking values participation and input from all parties involved, and traditionally, decisions are made collectively. Therefore, in practice, the family's identification of supports and plans should be given priority. The worker's involvement would focus on navigating the system and resources in a way that allows the family's plan to be implemented successfully. The child's voices and wishes would be sought, considered, and prioritized.

Historically, many Indigenous societies, such as the Haudenosaunee, were matriarchal, and women were seen as kindred spirits with the earth (Hill, 2017, p. 67). Land is central to Indigenous identity, such that names were denoted based on geographical features of their home territories (Hill 2017, p. 33). Decision making, roles, and duties flowed from relationships to the land, and each other, focusing on balance and availability of resources for all (Hill 2017, p.36). Different views of parenting in Indigenous culture as a shared responsibility beyond the nuclear family have been devalued in child welfare historically, and the current system does not do enough to integrate these ideas (Chewka 2009, p. 31). In practice, traditional cultural concepts of family and child-rearing would be used to make decisions around placement for the child, these decisions would be made in specific ways to that community. These arrangements are viewed not as "in care" but rather a recognition of traditional cultural Indigenous concepts of family that maintained balance in Indigenous communities for years before Colonization.

In situations where alternate care is considered, family and community options would be prioritized and funded such that children do not have to be cared for by a "stranger" to whom they have no prior connection. Reunification needs to be considered from the first day a child enters care and is central to every review period. Reunification plans need to be a specific, actionable and active process with shared responsibility by all those who know the child. The plan would focus on maintaining connections and contacts that include varied and different

connections and relationships necessary to that specific family. After a child returns home, supports would remain in place that allows a period for the family to readjust and achieve balance again. The focus would be on supportive healing relating to the trauma experienced by the family with the child's removal.

2. Structural vs. Individual assessment/intervention

Current child welfare practice very much situates the child and family within a very narrow concept that includes interventions focusing on identified individual or family deficits outside the context of larger structural or systemic forces. Issues such as substance use, poverty, and homelessness have been identified as complex consequences of colonialism yet continue to be addressed in practice through services to individual families. Many authors argue Indigenous children are generally entering care for issues that are considered structural or outside of the family, such as poverty, substance use, homelessness (Blacktock & Trocme 2004; Blackstock 2009; 2019; Fidler 2018; Landers 2018; Fernandez 2018). Whereas interventions in child welfare generally focus on the level of the individual family (Blackstock & Trocme 2004; Blackstock 2009; 2019). Research indicates that these same structural factors impact the options, opportunities, and process toward reunification for First Nations children (Blackstock 2019).

Parents talked about losing everything when their children were apprehended as they were making ends meet through disability and child tax benefits. When children enter care, these financial resources are diverted from parents resulting in the loss of housing, and their belongings. To have their children returned back into their care, parents were required to start over and meet the mandatory requirements of the child protection agency (Deane et al., 2018, p,

44). A positive outcome was resulted when reunification addressed the financial and housing needs of the family which increased the return of children to the family (Deane et al., 2018, p. 44). Mental health and the lack of appropriate, respectful mental health treatment can affect parents' ability to care for the children and affect the opportunities available for children to return home once they are in care (Farmer et al., 2009). In post-reunification, parents talked about a lack of follow up by workers and the long waits to receive supportive services once children returned home (Fernandez & Lee 2013 p. 1376).

In practice, addressing the structural or systemic barriers such as substance misuse, mental health, poverty, homelessness would lead to less stress on families and families are better to cope with life's ups and downs. The research shows that housing and basic needs are necessary for reunification to be successful (Deane et al., 2018, p. 44). However, loss of income for parents when children enter care can cause parents to lose adequate housing (Fernandez & Lee 2013, p. 1376). Often in child welfare, the language of neglect is used but generally refers to situations where parents do not have what they need to meet their child's basic needs.

Some programs address structural risks to maintain children in the home and ensure positive parent-child connections. In Deane et al., (2018) parents who experienced the LIFE (Life-in Family Enhancement) program which fostered mothers with their children talked about the benefit of addressing housing and financial supports while providing training, education, and connection to ongoing supports around parenting. Once again, Parents talked about losing everything when their children were placed in care due to the way social assistance funds are dispersed. Rent and housing expenses are so high in many geographical areas that child tax benefits are often used to supplement housing costs. When children enter care, child tax benefits are canceled, resulting in the loss of their housing, making reunification even harder (Deane et al.

2018, p. 44). In the LIFE program, parents were provided stable housing and income support for up to a year, which included education and training that allowed them to successfully reunify and maintain care of their children (Deane et al., 2018, p. 44). Some parents talked about being able to complete high school and training as a result of their basic needs being taken care of. The successful completion of high school and training gave these parents increased employability after they left the program.

3. Trauma/reconciliation

The impact of colonization and residential schools on the loss of cultural practices must also be a fundamental consideration when addressing child welfare reunification for Indigenous families. Healing from this type of trauma and loss is life-long (Starr 2016, p. 99), and it requires the reunification to both 'family' and 'homeland' (Landers et al., 2018, p. 348). The loss of cultural knowledge and practices relating to parenting has profoundly affected Indigenous communities in their way of caring and support one another (Chewka 2009, p. 31). However, the trauma with the loss of connection to 'homeland' is also significant to Indigenous peoples. The natural environment holds important knowledge, ways of being, and understanding that assists Indigenous nations in how they identify themselves in relation to their natural environment. The impact of Euro-western ideas of land as a commodity of property, as well the overt racism in which Indigenous people have experienced have led to Indigenous children and their families feeling the loss of self-esteem and identity (Starr 2016, p. 101). Reunification is often discussed in the literature as an activity to reclaim culture and history and therefore remains vital for Indigenous families to heal (Landers et al., 2018; Andrews 2002; Atwood 2008; John 2016; LaBoucane-Benson 2009).

Reunification in practice needs to include self-determination to ensure that Indigenous communities can determine their outcome without the influence of the Canadian government to counteract the historical trauma (Landers et al. 2018, p. 348). As part of the reconciliation process, an example would be offering adult children in looking to reunify or reconnect with their families the information they need to make the desired connections (Landers et al., 2018, p. 347). Reunification needs to be considered as an ongoing process that takes time versus a specific one-time event with a beginning and end timeframe. Therefore, resources to enable and support the efforts of reunification need to be put in place.

In practice, child welfare for Indigenous families would occur within the context of an Indigenous worldview and that can only be achieved by the Indigenous community (urban and or reserve) through self-determination. In 1980, the Splatsin of the Secwepemc Nation became one of the few First Nations in Canada to create and operate their own child welfare system, which continues to remain in operation today (Hyslop, Katie, 2021). The Secwepemc Nation did not have national support toward this goal, but over time were able to negotiate jurisdiction over their own child welfare and eventually, Splastin's was federally and provincially recognized (Hyslop, Katie, 2021). However, other First Nations were not allowed to assume jurisdiction over their own child welfare. The process toward Indigenous self-determination in child welfare has been slow, and funding has not transpired that would adequately meet the need or consistent with funding for non-Aboriginal child welfare (Blackstock 2019). The reconciliation process was designated a priority in child welfare. Yet, progress forward in actionable ways and adequate funding to support appropriate programs have not transpired (Blackstock 2019).

The process of reunification and reintegration back with family is essential for healing for all regardless of the length of time children are in care or when the reintegration occurs

(Wickham 2008, p. 2). The next section discusses the importance of connections and relationship with the reunification process.

4. Connections/Relationships

Wickham (2008) states: "Reconnecting is a process and a journey that cannot be rushed and is at times painful, but which is ultimately necessary for a complete sense of self" (p. 2). A relational worldview is central in Indigenous thought, it is not surprising that connections and relationships emerged as a central theme in this analysis focused on reunification for Indigenous children and families. As described earlier, connections between earth and sky, connections over time and place, all living things, collective strength, responsibilities, and obligations toward one another are central (Hill 2017, p 35). Connections and relationship to the natural world is just as important to Indigenous children and families as it builds upon the positive wellbeing, sense of self, identity and belonging to community.

About reunification specifically, Ankersmit (2016) describes fostering positive relationships as the "cornerstone of effective reunification practices" (p. 276) is especially important within child welfare systems where Indigenous parents often live with traumatic experiences and have very low levels of trust in the system. Maintaining meaningful connections for both children and families was described as necessary when a child entered care (Deane et al. 2018, p. 48). Thus, building different types of connections for the child and family that focus on supporting cultural identity and connection to community contributes to the self-esteem of a child in care and is crucial to achieving this goal of positive relationships (Chewka 2009, p. 33).

Connections and relationships between staff and workers are also related to good outcomes regarding decisions to reunify along with the success of reunification (Deane et al. 2018, p. 48). For example, Bodor et al. (2009) found that regular visits and contacts between parents and children in care were crucial in a path toward reunification (p. 13). The ability for parents, caregivers, and workers to collaborate is viewed as necessary in the working relationship when a child is in care. Research shows the family's relationship with the child welfare worker can affect decisions around reunification (Ankersmit 2016, p. 2). Furthermore, Research also found that the longer a child remained separated from their family and community, the more they became estranged from their culture and identity and risked losing these connections (Chewka 2009, p. 31).

Deane et al. found that fostering moms and children together, offered the opportunity for parents to engage in skill development on a variety of issues that both addressed risks for neglect and developed a trusting and collaborative relationship between parents and staff through supportive day-to-day interactions (Deane et al. 2018, p. 44). This program also focused on building relationships and connections that prioritized and maintain the parent-child relationship by ensuring they were not separated (Deane et al. 2018, P. 43).

In practice, reunification plans begin when a child first enters care and actively maintains and fosters this sense of connection through planned, regular and consistent visits. Further contacts and other opportunities to maintain and foster a positive relationship between parent and child should be actively sought and prioritized. Reunification would be considered beyond a one-time event, and beyond the time a child is in care. Starr (2016) argues, "Supports would be provided throughout the process whenever it happens, at any age, and for all Indigenous children who are or have had any type of involvement with the child welfare system" (p. 102). Repairing

connections, loss, and grieving is frequently part of healing for separated Indigenous families, and community involvement through welcoming and ceremony was vital in this process of healing (LaBoucane-Benson 2009). This brought families an opportunity to work through their lost connection and rebuild relationships.

5. Indigenous Research

The scoping review showed that there is currently only a sparse consideration of reunification in the literature generally but there is very little scholarship that focused on Indigenous families involved in the child welfare research. The majority of this research reflects Western worldview, using western methods that call the results and usefulness into question for Indigenous families. Fernandex & Lee (2013) state: "Reunification is at the center of meaningful child welfare, yet reunification has tended to remain largely invisible" in research other than timing, variables, and predictors that could lead to reunification (p. 1375). Similarly, Esposito et al. found that in Canada, there are no province-wide longitudinal studies on the case dynamics that influence reunification (Esposito et al. 2014, p. 279). Ankersmit (2016) found that there was not much research regarding how alternate carers can support the reunification process or how the relationship between parents and alternate caregivers influences the reunification process (p. 274). Several authors (Blackstock 2009; Fernandez et al. 2013; Esposito 2014), discuss the lack of research regarding after the reunification event is over, other than predicting factors that would lead to a child re-entering care (Fernandez et al. 2013; Blackstock 2009; Esposito 2014).

The very different ways of knowing discussed in Indigenous thought such as the work presented by Blackstock show that what is measured and studied is not necessarily valuable or applicable for Indigenous families. Data is collected using western concepts of family and

cultural identity and is not easily translated with Indigenous families (Fernandez & Lee 2013, p. 1375). These beliefs have led to little authentic statistical information about Indigenous children involved in child welfare. Little is known of what happened to many Indigenous children after they entered care (Blackstock & Trocme 2004, p. 9) and what is truly being measured (Blackstock 2009). Looking at the simple definition of words complicates both the study and interpretation of data such that it is not clear what is being discussed (Toombs et al., 2018, p. 409).

Authors like Starr (2016) have pointed out that many First Nation communities are oral societies. Storytelling is essential to bear witness to what has happened, as well for learning and healing (Starr 2016, p. 98). Indigenous methods such as storytelling have traditionally been questioned in academic research as a less valid method (Starr 2016, p. 89). Kovach describes storytelling as a means to give a voice to marginalized populations and assist in creating outcomes from the research aligned with the needs of the marginalized community (Kovach 2010, p. 100). In this way, Indigenous methods such as storytelling are decolonizing (Kovach 2010). Storytelling allows for the presentation of facts and can capture emotion which adds to the value of the information presented (Starr 2016, p. 93). Often participation in research that included storytelling allowed participants to feel that they were healing and helping others; in this way, storytelling has a focus on healing (Starr 2016, p. 95).

The use of research, such as this scoping review to build a case for approach to reunification is in and of itself a challenge to Indigenous ways of knowing. For many Indigenous people, research has historically been "done to" Indigenous people and has therefore research outcomes presented from Euro-western viewpoints that cannot understand and interpret Indigenous culture leading to misconceptions and misrepresentations (Starr 2016, p. 93).

Therefore, it is critical that child welfare research regarding reunification be community-led, ethically responsible, and presented in non-exploitive ways (Starr 2016, p. 96). This can begin with honoring existing, historical agreements such as Two Row Wampum (Hill Sr. & Coleman 2019).

Research regarding reunification needs to be from an Indigenous worldview, use methods that prioritize Indigenous ways of thought, and include collecting data that is meaningful in the context of the Indigenous community it will be used. The scoping review shows much disparity between studies regarding what is meant by reunification, family, and permanency. Research using indigenous ways of knowing would use expansive definitions of family that included extended family and community members that the child and family identify as meaningful. Reunification opportunities would be sought and measured that fit Indigenous concepts ideas of these terms. This research would then be used to develop and inform programs and services to support reunification in ways that support the family holistically and in their home community, including supports that continue after the reunification event.

These five themes were consistently found in the literature for Indigenous reunification in child welfare. These themes will be used in the next section to further analyze the 'process' of reunification where the original study questions will be examined through an analysis of the literature that presents the family's experience in their own words. Blackstock's Breath of Life theory will then be used to center the child, surrounded by the family, worker, and substitute caregiver.

Chapter Five:

Analysis

For this analysis, the study questions will be reordered to prioritize the "experience" of reunification. This fits with the use of Indigenous ways of knowing and specifically the use of Blackstock's presentation of Breath of Life Theory as an invitation to explore they ways in which we shape and apply theory in child welfare practice (Blackstock 2009; 2019). Further, this analysis can contribute to research that presents the reunification process using an Indigenous lens, through Indigenous voices, in their own words. Therefore, I will discuss the process of reunification as presented in the literature from the perspective of the child, the family, the worker, and the substitute caregiver, using the information gathered in the scoping review. This analysis is important to hear the different perspectives of each involved in the reunification process individually, to prioritize the child and family's experience and to allow workers and substitute caregivers to hear the family's experience directly.

The original research questions were listed as follows:

What is Indigenous Reunification in Child Welfare?
- How is this process/event planned for?
- How is this process/event experienced by those involved?
- How long did it take for the family to adjust?
- How is this process supported and maintained?

To prioritize the experience of the reunification process itself, the questions will be reordered as follows:

1. What is Indigenous Reunification in Child Welfare? How was the reunification process experienced by those involved?
2. How was the reunification event planned for and prepared?
3. How long did it take the family to adjust?
4. How was the reunification process supported and maintained?

By presenting the information gathered from the perspective of each of the participants the reader is reminded there is a variety of experiences through this process. Further, the child's

perspective is most important and presented first to allow the reader to center the child's voice in the analysis and discussion. This is consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing that place the child at the center.

How was the reunification process experienced?

Child

The child's experience is generally described in the literature by adults recalling and retelling their experience as children. Many different individual experiences are described, with very tragic and traumatic experiences being common with such feelings of loss, separation, lack of information about their culture, history, and identity (Starr 2016, p. 129). Much hurt was described among Indigenous adults who spent time in child welfare care, especially the longer that person spent in care. Some adults who spent a long time in care described feelings of not being good enough, of hurt and regret that people were paid to look after them (Starr 2016, p. 94). Reunifying adults wanted adoptive and foster caregivers to understand and be trained about colonialism and racism and provided with instruction on maintaining traditional culture, relationships, and connections for children in care (Starr 2016, p. 130).

Some adults provided stories about their reunification experience as adults whereby they were reunifying with "strangers." Yet many similarities were reflected that led to a sense of missed connections and the need for various levels of "reconnection" with different family/community members to occur overtime (Starr 2016, p. 120). Siblings who were separated by the child welfare system and grew up without the experiences of their close sibling relationships talked about how this loss this had impacted their life. The loss of connecting to siblings and family is also complicated by the differences of fundamental values and beliefs that

were imposed by their foster or adopted family (Starr 2016, p. 121). Thus, reunification is described as part of the healing process, and as part of the process of figuring out who they are, which includes dealing with emotions of anger, helplessness, and loss as they moved through adulthood (Starr 2016, p. 122).

Parents

Parent's experiences of reunification are captured in different ways in the literature. While these approaches are not systemic changes in the structure of child welfare, they are a short-term approach in supporting parents whose children go into care. Parents talked about the importance of regular, predictable, meaningful contact with their children, and participation in everyday life events as crucial to reunification (Jackson & McConachy 2014, p. 70). When children entered care, many were often moved far from their families and community. Therefore, parents were not able to keep in contact with their children or attend such activities as sports or community events.

In Deane et al. (2018), parents who experienced the LIFE (Live-in Family Enhancement) program that fostered moms with their children talked about the benefit of addressing housing and financial supports while providing training, education, and connection to ongoing community supports for the family. This program allowed parents to maintain their supports following involvement with the program. Without the program parents lost social assistance funds that supported their family such with rent and housing expenses. When children enter into care, the child tax benefit support is canceled, causing parents to lose their housing and making reunification even harder (Deane et al. 2018, p. 44). The LIFE program ensured parents with stable housing and a living standard for up to a year. The program also included education and training to successfully reunify and maintain care of their children (Deane et al. 2018, p. 44).

Some parents talked about this allowing them to complete high school and training, giving them an increased employability after they leave the program.

When parents reunited with their children as adults, they talked about a sense of loss for the time spent apart and the effort required to get to know one another again (Adams et al., 2017). Both parents and adult children recounted their experiences including post-traumatic stress, loss of culture, impact on self-esteem, loss of identity, and connections for themselves and their children (Adam et al. 2017; Landers et al., 2018; Jackson 2007; Starr 2016). Many talked about reunification as a critical part of healing for them as adults (Starr 2016; Jackson & McConachy 2014).

Worker

In the research, the worker's perspective is generally described in relation to their decision-making power to determine or promote the goals of family reunifying rather than descriptive experiences of the child's return (Fernandez et al. 2013, p. 89). Workers talked about safety concerns, parents' ability to follow through with plans, and compliance with agency and government regulations (Fernandez et al. 2013, p 89). Workers described a desire for parents to be in community programs and services, which were generally the preferred method of "support" for families both while the child was in care and following reunification (Fernandez 2013, p. 92).

Substitute caregiver

Substitute caregivers describe different reunification events, such as observing the child and offering emotional support (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 97). Most felt that their role in this process was to provide physical and material safety for the child during the process; a small minority of alternate caregivers talked about reunifying the child home as part of their role (Fernandez et al. 2013, p. 104). Ankersmit (2016) found that there was not a lot research

regarding how alternate carers can support the reunification process or how the relationship between parents and alternate caregivers influences the reunification process (p. 274).

How was the reunification event planned for and prepared?

Child

Children might return home after some time in care, they might age out of care, they might be estranged long after they are no longer in care. The planning and preparation for reunification varies on whether a child was reunifying from the time care or as an adult following adoption or aged out of care. Adult children generally describe feeling of being excluded from the process, not knowing why they entered care or whom to go to for information (Jackson & McConachy 2014, p. 70). What has been learned through the literature is that visits and contacts with all family members (immediate and extended) are essential part of reunification with the family. However, when children entered child welfare care often led to less contact than was desired and helpful to families (Jackson & McConachy 2014, p. 71).

Reuniting as adults, many talked about not having the information (names, forms, identification) they needed to find their birth families and the administrative barriers to getting their information (Adam et al., 2018). Children exiting care in their teens often did not have adequate supports in navigating the process of locating and making connections to reunify with their families despite research that shows most reconnect with family in some way (Mendes et al. 2016, p. 8). Programs such as "Family Finding" have been introduced in some areas to aid in this process of reunifying children and families (Adam et al., 2018). This program assists adult children who were part of the child welfare system to locate and contact family members that they have been estranged from with the hope of building connections and relationships back to their family (Adam et al., 2018).

Parents

Some parents felt that their involvement in planning for their children in care was undervalued or an afterthought as the worker was focused on what they saw as an arbitrary concept of "safety" (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 88). Parents also talked about wanting to be central to the decision-making around reunification and all other parts of their child's time in care (Jackson & McConachy 2014, p. 70). Some parents spoke of the pressure by child protection workers and agencies to complete programs or attend services as a condition to have contact with their children. With parents attempting to meet the expectations imposed by child protection agencies added additional stress and gave them little time to plan or prepare for reunifying with their children (Fernandez et al, 2013, p. 89). Much of the information gathered showed the mother's perspective, and fathers' involvement is often missing in the planning and options related to reunification and the child's time in care (Fernandez et al., 2013).

Worker

Much of the research showing the worker's perspective describes attempts to predict the factors influencing the decision to reunify reunification (Fernandez et al., 2013; Deane et al. 2018). As described above, workers' focus tends to be on concerns for safety, and as such, planning and preparation focused on addressing identified risk and connecting community services to mitigate this risk. Workers also discussed the importance of visits and regular contact to maintain the parent-child relationship while children were away from home in order to increase chances of reunification (Deane et al., 2018, p. 44). The worker's perception of safety influences decisions of whether or not reunification was possible (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 87).

Worker's themselves felt their decisions were most influenced by parental attitudes toward cooperation with identified plans (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 88). Collaboration and the

relationship between worker and family were regarded as a predictor of positive outcomes in the worker's decision to reunify (Ankersmit 2016, p. 273). Workers talked about the impact of high caseloads on their ability to provide the time to adequately plan for reunification (Mendes et al., 2016, p. 7).

Substitute caregiver

Alternate caregivers did not generally see that they had a role in the reunification process itself or the planning for reunification, other than needing to know the planned process in order to adjust their schedules and support the child emotionally (Ankersmit 2016). Some caregivers expressed a willingness to participate in the work of reunification but did not see supporting parents as part of their role (Ankersmit 2016, p. 274). Research indicates that alternate caregivers felt the most important factor influencing whether children returned home or not was what workers planned and the professional judgments that they made about how the family was able to meet identified goals or not (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 87).

How long did it take the family to readjust?

Child

The research does provide information regarding what happens after children are reunified other than some attempts to establish predictors of children who return to care following reunification (Fernandez & Lee 2013). Studies that provide information from adults regarding their time in care do not specifically address a time of adjustment following reunification. Adults who later describe their experience talk about being fearful of returning to care, loss, and trauma (Mendes et al., 2016, p. 8).

Parents

Some parents talked about the importance of an initial celebration at the time of the reunification event. More importantly, felt the need for support following the reunification event to help the process of "rejoining", finding a place and get to know each other again (Starr 2016, p. 102). No specific literature was found that studied the length of time it took children and families to settle or readjust. However, some parents talked about needing support for several months to a year in case of difficulties (Jackson 2007, p. 166). Some parents discussed specific programs about their practical supports following reunification that were said to be valuable in terms of "communication, stress management, crisis intervention and discipline" (Jackson 2007, p. 158). Some parents talked about child welfare involvement following reunification as a very stressful event as they worried the child could return to care at any moment (Jackson 2007, p. 167, Jackson &McConachy 2014, p. 24).

Worker

Workers talk about the concern for the success of the reunification as viewed from a lens of potential harms to the child and the need for community/family resources and supports, increased in-person and phone contact, and crisis support for a period of time following the reunification event (Jackson & McConachy 2014, p. 25). Timeframes for support were generally discussed as an individual to the family and their needs. Workers talked about an increased workload following reunification (increased home visits, increased phone contacts, contact with community supports) worry for the child's safety, and worry for the parent's ability to recognize the child's needs (Mendes et al. 2016, p. 7).

Substitute caregiver

Where alternate caregivers generally did not actively participate in the reunification, follow-up or support after the reunification generally did not occur as they did not see this as part

of their role (Ankersmit 2016, p. 275). Adults discussed their experience and divided loyalties to reconnecting and the hurt that some substitute caregivers expressed when they chose to return home or reconnected with their families (Jackson 2007). Reunifying adults wanted adoptive and foster caregivers to understand and be trained in colonialism and racism and to maintain relationships, and cultural connections for children in care (Starr 2016, p. 130).

How was the reunification process supported and maintained?

Child

In Ontario, Child welfare standards mandate that the children's service worker sees the child privately every thirty days while they are in care to ensure that their needs are met and that their views are heard. The child's wishes would in this way become part of the child protection file and advocated by the children's service worker during regular case reviews. However, the literature does not explicitly describe the child's experience of how this process is maintained. As adults, many talked about feeling the need for more support during the reunification process, such as someone to talk to kids about what is happening, let them know what is going on in their lives and what they need to feel supported through this process (Starr 2016, p. 132). Some children talked about their worry of suddenly having to go back into care, this worry as well as the trauma stayed with them (Mendes et al. 2016, p. 9). The importance of reassurance and support were important during this their time in care, but "getting back to normal" remained their focus (Mendes et al., 2016, p. 10).

The research shows that many adults who have been in care describe their home community as an important role in the process in reunifying (Starr 2016, p. 109). For those adult children, the reconnecting to their home community provides a connection to their parents, siblings and to immediate and extended family members. This reconnection and welcoming also

connects them to their culture and their identity as an Indigenous person (Starr 2016, p. 109). The acceptance to the community allows those children who were adopted or in long-term care to avoid having to "pick a side" to belong.

Parents

Parents talked about worry that they would make a mistake and the child would go back into care (Jackson 2007, p. 167). Some parents talked about increased meetings with the worker, managing their programs and activities, as well as dealing with their own and their child's emotions around the events that transpired with going into care (Jackson & McConachy 2014, p. 24). Some parents talked about valuable skills they learned such as budgeting and parenting methods through participating in programs that allowed them to maintain the child at home following reunification (Deane et al., 2018; Ankersmit 2016; Fernandez et al., 2013).

Worker

Workers discussed offering support such as transportation assistance, being flexible around contact times, emotional support through contact and communication, and connection to community services as ways they support reunification (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 93). Some studies showed that workers tended to be reassured if a family reached out for support. The worker's ability to broker and manage services for parents and the relationship between workers and parents were viewed as essential for the success of the reunification process (Fernandez et al., 2013, p. 94).

Substitute caregiver

Ankermit (2016) found that when alternate caregivers were not actively engaged in the reunification process, they were more likely to resist restoration (p. 274). This research shows the alternate caregivers do not generally see that they have a role in the reunification process

itself (Ankersmit 2016). Some caregivers expressed a willingness to participate in the reunification work but did not see supporting parents as part of their role (Ankersmit 2016, p. 274).

The next section will examine how we can reimagine the reunification process of child welfare system by incorporating Blackstock's Breath of Life theory

Chapter Six:

Discussion

Reimagining Reunification using Breath of Life:

In discussing the Breath of Life theory, Blackstock (2009, 2019) talks about the benefit this perspective could have in terms of reunification in that:

a) children would not need to enter care with expanded definitions of the family as the child would remain with family and community;
b) reunification would be considered using expansive definitions of time such that adults could seek reunification throughout their life, thus benefitting from healing and support;
c) addressing structural risks would provide resources for parents to be successful in reducing the need for reunification.

Child protection work would focus on the relational worldview principles where connections and relationships are considered in an expansive way over space and time. For children and families, these connections are both maintained and expanded when involved with child welfare. 'Child protection' decisions would be made by understanding the historical and structural factors that have impact Indigenous families for over generations, as well the interventions in which a child protection agency would include at a structural level would be considered even before a child is removed from the family or community. The respect and dignity need to inform child welfare work and focus on family strengths and prioritizes the family as a central focus to the wellbeing of children. Thus, life challenges are normalized and supported in traditional culturally appropriate ways where the focus is on support and family maintenance rather than deficits. In doing so, the child is considered a sacred gift from the

creator and would to be at the center of Indigenous social structures surrounded and supported by family, extended family, and community (Blackstock 2009, 2019).

The process of the Breath of Life with reunification includes the four dimensions (physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive) and how each of the dimensions would be considered for reunification of Indigenous adults that were part of the child welfare system back to the family and community. Blackstock (2009) states that "the child, family, community, and world are wholly affected by these four dimensions, informed by ancestral knowledge, which is to be passed to future generations in perpetuity" (p. 7). Ancestorial knowledge refers to Indigenous beliefs that their ancient cultural knowledge of family, community and nation structures which not only sustain the wellbeing of collective, but more importantly sustains and contributes to the wellbeing of the individual. Blackstock acknowledges that Indigenous ancestors were mostly right and provided this understanding of knowing, being and doing through sharing of experiential learning and stories. Unfortunately, colonial systems such as child welfare that have interrupted this process leaving families without vital cultural information (Blackstock 2009, p. 7).

Dimensions:

1. Physical Dimension (land, water, air, food, shelter)

For Indigenous families, Blackstock (2019) refers to a connection to the land and community at a much broader level than is understood in Western thinking. This is a connection to the land, sky, people, culture, language, traditions, and customs (Blackstock 2009). Colonial systems and structures have and continue to impact this connection through access to adequate resources for Indigenous families in both rural and urban areas (Fernandez & Lee 2013, Blackstock & Trocme 2004). Poverty, substance use, and homelessness are identified as complex

consequences of colonialism and are also identified as factors that lead to children coming into care (Blackstock 2009; Blackstock & Trocme 2004; Fernandez 2013). If basic physical needs were met within communities, when life challenges arise, families would be supported through the physical connection to the land and community without leaving their home community (Blackstock 2009). Access to services would be local, affordable, culturally traditional, strength-based, and holistic. Traditional programs would be funded equitably.

If child welfare included prevention services, families could be supported without children entering care. Parents would feel safe seeking help without fear of losing the care of their children. Families would remain intact as parents would receive support to meet their children's needs. Children can remain in their home communities for support, and families receive service in their community. This would reduce the need for reunification as children remain connected to their communities. For example, the "LIFE" program in Deane et al. 2018 used existing Ministry Funding to foster both children and mothers with another set of parents in their home community, focusing on building relationships, trust and collaboration through daily coaching and mentoring. (Dean et al. 2018). This program concentrated on meeting the family's basic needs for food and shelter while expanding supports and keeping the family intact. Children and parents remained together and the trauma of separation when a child enters care was avoided. Ideally, similar programs that provide for the maintenance of basic housing and financial resources would be available to other families, such as single fathers and two-parent households.

Another aspect of the physical dimension is alternate care where necessary, and family options would be actively sought and prioritized. Often decisions in child welfare where there is a consideration for an Indigenous child entering care must be considered through a decolonized

lens taking in consideration the colonialism and historical trauma that many Indigenous communities have experienced. Family and Kinship customary care options would be used when there are no other options to keeping the family together. Also, children in the care of child welfare agencies care would have reunification plans that begin when children entered into care. These plans would prioritize the child and family's wishes and would receive regular review. The importance of contact between parents and children is maximized, taking place in the child's home community. Visits would be supported rather than surveilled. Reunification plans would ensure that information sharing is directed by the family, and the child understands the process. In addition, reunification is an event that is celebrated, and family supports would remain in place for a period of time following the reunification event. Parents can ask for help and support when challenges occurred without fear and would receive the support they need.

For adults who were involved with child welfare as children, reunification must always be a consideration as many seek a connection back with their family and community throughout their adult lives. These adult children have varied experiences of trauma, loss, abuse, and even good experiences with their surrogate family. Programs described in the literature such as "The Educational Resource Center" (Metcalf 1979) and "Family Finding" (Edmonds & Pepueneza 2018) offer various supports and funding for adults to locate and reconnect with separated family members. Programs geared to physical reconnection and reunification such as those studied by Bodor et al. (2009), described the use of celebration events such as "Bringing home the kids" where a reunification and reconnection day was held for all children in care to reconnect with their community (Bodor et al. 2009).

The "In Search of your Warrior" program described by LaBoucane-Benson 2009, provides a framework for building connections and relationships through sharing and teaching

circles designed to strengthen and reconnect families (LaBoucane-Benson 2009). Here, reunification is viewed as a lifelong and ongoing process of connection and contact with family and community and is deeply connected to culture and identity (Landers et al., 2015). Specific funding towards this physical dimension of reconnection should be available for adult children and should come from the Federal government's commitment to reconciliation in supporting those adults who want to reconnect with their family, community, and culture. This support should not have administrative barriers and child welfare agencies need to work with local Indigenous communities to establish reunification events, ceremonies, or programs.

2. Emotional (attachment to family and community)

At the emotional level, reunification plans would ensure the child's participation in the process, specifically to ensure that the child knows what is transpiring and what to expect. In doing so, the child knows what is happening with them while they are in care. This information needs to be specific and age-appropriate; it needs to involve the child in planning visits and contact with immediate family, extended family and anyone important to the child. This is also an opportunity for the child to discuss their wants and needs regarding reunification in a way that is heard and honoured. However, careful attention needs to be considered when what the child wants is not possible.

In the case of adult reunification, it would be important to focus on addressing any trauma which the adult child has experience, and to repair family and community connections. The Family Finding Program (Edmonds & Pepueneza 2018) could offer more assistance to adults while reconnecting to their family by offering emotional support in the process of reunification (Edmonds & Pepueneza 2018). Also, individual communities could support and

provide funding as a level of service to access the required information adults need to reconnect with their families.

3. Spiritual (spirituality, life purpose)

At the spiritual level, Indigenous child welfare would provide service to all Indigenous families whether living on reserve or in urban areas and would be conducted by Elders and Knowledge Keepers, or Indigenous workers that had connections to those that carried cultural teachings within the child's community. Indigenous children would be involved in their specific plan regarding the spiritual and cultural needs based on age-appropriate teachings, stage of child development, and parental support. The opportunity for spiritual and cultural should be funded to allow the child to participate in cultural traditions and ceremonies. Also, the trauma of separation from the family can be processed in a traditional cultural way that is meaningful to the child.

For adult children of the child welfare system, spirituality is also important to emotional well-being, identity, and the healing of that individual and their family. In this sense, reunification can be an active form of decolonization and reclamation of cultural identity for both individuals, families and the communities. Communities would provide easily accessible connection to Elders and Knowledge Keepers as supports and services to provide those looking to reunify, understand and participate in community gatherings and ceremonies. Many adult children looking to reconnect with their family and community identify that they experience loss at a spiritual and cultural level (Adam et al. 2018; Landers et al. 2018; Jackson 2007; Starr 2016; Mendes et al., 2016). Therefore, reunification services would ease these barriers for those adults searching for information regarding their personal histories and connection back to their home communities. In the research several authors (Mendes et al. 2016; Landers et al. 2018; Rule &

Rice, 2013), state many of the adults involved in the study stated that they were looking for overt signs of welcome from their family and community and were seeking connections to Elders and others who could support them in their process.

4. Cognitive (self & community actualization, identity, service)

At the cognitive level, the awareness of self and identity is an important dimension for Indigenous children and is, directly connected to having knowledge of their culture and heritage. Unfortunately, current mainstream child welfare practices appear to see the significance of culture and heritage as less important to Indigenous children as they age and grow. However, adoption research indicates that culture and heritage play a significant role for adoptees and this desire to know themselves on an intellectual level increases over time for Indigenous children who are adopted (Sinclair 2016, p. 12). As such, Sinclair advocates that child welfare move from the 'best interests of the child' to focus more robustly on the 'best interests of the child as an adult.' Therefore, ensuring that culture awareness and understanding as it relates to the sense of self and identity are a considerable priority (Sinclair 2016, p. 12). This set of priorities contributes to a more secure and healthy identity formation in adolescence and is central to the facilitation of feelings of belonging and safety in the world (Sinclair 2016, p. 12).

At the cognitive level, the child would ultimately be able to participate in their home community, in school, sports, and other activities that were in place before the child entering care. Parents would be able to attend and participate in activities with their children, and contributing to the role and identity of themselves as parents and within the broader family structure as it is understood from a cultural perspective. These cultural opportunities would help to maintain the parent-child contact while providing support and safety. Active efforts would be made to ensure that opportunities for parent/child contact are maximized and that costs

associated would not be a burden on the parents or family. Therefore, funding would be available through the child welfare system, ensuring children and families are supported with the services that work for them and that are culturally appropriate.

The process of reunification is also central to self-identity for Indigenous adults separated from their families as children. The cognitive dimension must adequately address the impact of this loss that is experienced at both the individual, family and community levels. As a result, the process of reunification can therefore be both decolonizing and healing for all involved.

Limitations/Implications

The articles chosen for the inclusion and exclusion were based on my years of experience in the child welfare sector, as well as my interpretation and view of the world. The themes identified are meaningful to me, however other researchers may identify and draw out other themes of importance using the same information. I consciously chose to include a variety of sources and types of information and decided to not only present peer-reviewed journal articles, but also include grey literature such as films, theses and dissertations, agency, and government reports in this thesis. Historically, the inclusion of only peer-reviewed articles and chapters for scoping reviews was like to mean the exclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing, focusing only on literature from a western-Eurocentric viewpoints (Toombs et al., 2018, p. 409). In doing so, this work substantialized a colonizing and assimilating form of cultural genocide of Indigenous children, families and communities that aligned with similar strategies as those used by residential schools and enfranchisement legislation.

While scoping reviews offer a method of rapidly mapping the literature and key concepts of a particular area, as well as providing a breadth of information that is available relating to that particular topic. They do not provide an in-depth study of the topic and are limited to a snapshot of what was available during that particular time (Arksey & O'Malley 2003). The scoping review for this thesis presents an overview of the available research and literature relating to Indigenous reunification in child welfare up until the fall of 2020 only.

My understanding and application of Indigenous ways of knowing, including using Blackstock's Breath of Life theory, comes from an many years in the child welfare field as well as an academic perspective as opposed to an experiential Indigenous community context, and must be considered in this light. Further, my education and training prioritized Euro-western

ways of knowing that have discounted and excluded Indigenous ways of knowing. I have acquired my limited knowledge and some understanding of concepts relating to Indigenous culture and knowledge through this process. However, a presentation or analysis that reflects a great diversity and complexity regarding Indigenous communities is beyond my ability and scope and beyond the scope of the limited time and space of a Masters thesis.

Future Considerations

The following considerations are my interpretations that I have gathered and learned from this scoping review process, through reflection, and analysis. This information will be taken back to the Six Nations Evaluation Advisory Committee (the committee has changed its name to reflect the work they are doing in the Six Nations community. This committee now refers to themselves as the Six Nations Program Advisory Team) for review and consideration. Their thoughts and feedback are vital and would direct any future research, program, and resource development about reunification for Indigenous children in the community. It is my hope that this research and scoping review could be a starting point for community focused research and program development around reunification and considered within the child welfare context to ensure reunification is a primary consideration in work with Indigenous families.

As discussed throughout this paper, literature regarding reunification for Indigenous families in child welfare must use Indigenous methods and ways of thinking to assess and analyze, identify needs, and to inform appropriate intervention. These ideas emerged as a theme through this scoping review process and were discussed to some degree in all the articles chosen for inclusion. It must be noted that reunification from an Indigenous perspective is a lifelong process that is important for identity and self-esteem and are a part of the decolonizing process of

cultural reclamation and reconciliation. Therefore, reunification must be considered as a vital part of the Canadian government's reconciliation process. More importantly, "given that identity is a lifelong process and that the majority of adoptees repatriate as young adults, our attention needs to be directed to the fact that 'best interests of the child' for Indigenous families should also consider the 'best interests of the child as an adult" (Sinclair 2016, p. 12). This shift is consistent with Indigenous ways of knowing that consider more expansive concepts of time and space but are a long way from current child welfare practice that mandates restrictive timelines for decision-making.

In the current child welfare system, the worker's time and energy is focused on paperwork that addresses risk in terms of liability to the organization as opposed to affect or support to the family. For example, agencies gather feedback from service users to better inform practice. How this is done in practice is vague. The gathering of feedback seems to be another way to 'show' that client input is sought and valued (as a measure of providing good service) when in fact it is just an exercise in documentation to meet government standards.

Through this scoping review, I was most impacted by the LIFE program that is described by Deane et al. 2018, where mothers and children were fostered together within existing government funding models. This program creatively used existing foster care placement funding to create a safe environment where the family remained intact. At the same time, work focused on skill development and building supportive relationships and connections for the family to alleviate the need for child welfare involvement. Less restrictive funding models that would allow for the creation of similar types of programs should also be considered.

I have worked in two different child protection agencies within Ontario during my career. Each agency engages with Indigenous children and families in different ways, and the nature of

this engagement changed over time. Some differences have been reflected in the social and political climate of Ontario. While other differences could be attributed to the urban versus rural nature of the two agencies I worked for. Despite calls for change over the years, I have yet to see meaningful change. The child welfare system argues for change and limits opportunities for change through complex layers of standards, guidelines, and regulations. The Canadian government has made some progress toward authorization of Indigenous child well-being agencies, which give Indigenous communities direct decision making regarding the child welfare involvement of families in the community. However, the current process has simply required Indigenous communities to use the current child welfare policies and procedures within their communities regardless of fit. Further, the government has not funded these in a meaningful way. This has left Indigenous communities advocating for priorities such as prevention which is not something the Ministry has been supportive of for child protection agencies in Ontario (Blackstock 2009).

Each of the child protection agencies where I have worked sought to meet Provincial standards in different organizational ways through community-based workers, school-based workers, Indigenous workers/teams as opposed to generic caseloads. Each agency targeted different areas of interest, such as addictions, youth services, family finding, anti-violence, creating different programs and services available to families. Presumably, this allows agencies to address identified issues in their communities, but also cause confusion regarding different levels of service for families that are agency specific.

Over the last several years, child welfare increasingly sought kinship arrangements to help reduce the number of children in care. An ongoing study needs to determine the

effectiveness of this as a method for preserving family connections and relationships for Indigenous children. In taking up this inquiry, the following question needs to be asked;

1) Has Kinship care been able to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care or to maintain the child's relationship with their family and community?

This question is important for future consideration as kinship arrangements continue to increase in child welfare. The planning and implementation of reunification for Indigenous families must be informed by research that fits with Indigenous concepts of reunification and family. Programs and services need to be created and implemented by the community to support the family's reunification within the community. Reunification needs to be specifically funded both within child welfare for Indigenous children returning home, but also for adult children who are reconnecting later in life but involvement in child welfare. Indigenous communities need to have the resources to address the needs and desires prioritized by the community in ways best deemed fit by the community.

I argue that decisions in child welfare where an Indigenous child would be entering care must be considered through a decolonized lens, thus considering the colonialism and historical trauma that has impacted Indigenous children, families and communities and finding ways that support rather than tear families apart. As child welfare agencies attempt to make changes to reduce the number of Indigenous children in care and work in partnership with local Indigenous agencies, other parts of the system are in their own various stages of change. For example, family court remains an adversarial, patriarchal, and oppressive system that continues to inflict trauma on Indigenous families. A recent experience an Indigenous coworker shared with me what occurred when she attended a virtual family court appearance for a family that she had just begun to work with. Prior to the court appearance, this worker spent many hours working with

this family to strengthen and support them due to the trauma of having their children removed from their care. She helped them and their extended family to build a plan to ensure safety so that the children could be return to their care. However, the court process focused on the past actions of this family versus the progress they had made and the plan they had created to allow the children to return to their family. Unfortunately, mandated timelines for 'permanency' under the guise of the 'best interests of the child' continue to be prioritized in child welfare over maintaining family, cultural and community connections. These incidents further traumatize the Indigenous families involved, as well the Indigenous workers who support them (many who will ultimately have their own experiences of trauma relating to contact with the child welfare system). Some child protection agencies have created an 'Indigenous team' where families who identify as Indigenous are referred. This fits with the community-based team organization many agencies support and allows families to work with someone who understands their culture and heritage. However, this also continues to allow the remainder of the agency to feel that the 'problem' addressing the over-representation of Indigenous children in care is addressed, and therefore requires no further effort. A blended team consisting of Indigenous workers and allies could increase learning, understanding throughout the agency and support for Indigenous workers. Rather than having the Indigenous worker working in isolation, the learning, understanding, collaboration, and sharing ideas between Indigenous and non-Indigenous child welfare agencies and workers could lead to better service for all families. However, the ultimate goal for Indigenous communities is the gradual creation and expansion of focused organizations on the wellbeing and preventions supports for Indigenous children and families.

Racial bias also impacts how decisions are made at all stages (intake, investigation, ongoing) of the child welfare interventions including interpretation of concepts such as "best

interests" and "attachment." This bias is so much a part of child welfare that it is hard to imagine how alterations to the current system could create meaningful change for Indigenous families. Further, child protection workers need to understand how Indigenous families experience bias and oppression through systems such as family court to begin to affect change by finding other ways to work with Indigenous families that do not include family court.

Family and customary care options need to be used when there is no safe way to keep the family together. Children currently in child welfare care must have reunification plans that begin when they enter care and are reviewed regularly in a fashion that prioritizes the child and family's wishes. Contact between parents and children needs to be maximized, in the child's home community, and supported rather than surveilled. Reunification needs to be planned to ensure information is directed by the family and the child, as well the child understands the process. In addition, reunification is celebrated, and family supports remain in place following the reunification event. Parents would be able to ask for help and support when challenges occurred without fear and would receive the support they need cooperatively without the need for adversarial interventions.

Conclusion

This scoping review sought to locate, identify, and interpret the available information relating to reunification for Indigenous children following a time in child welfare care. Discussion and analysis focused on the child and family's experience of the reunification process itself, how this was experienced and supported within the child welfare system. Reunification was then imagined through Indigenous ways of thinking drawing on the Breath of Life theory as outlined by Cindy Blackstock (2009, 2019).

This review highlights five themes about reunification in child welfare drawn from the articles and literature considered in this scoping review and through analysis of materials focused on Indigenous child welfare and reunification materials. First, the use of Indigenous methods to understand the needs and the best ways to address these needs were considered. Unfortunately, child welfare has historically been informed by Euro-western ways of thinking that do not meet the needs or support Indigenous social structure of the family and community. Second, work in child welfare needs to shift from a focus on the individual to addressing structural barriers such as poverty, addiction and homelessness that continue to place Indigenous children and families in contact with child welfare. Third, the historical trauma inflicted by the child welfare system in Canada is well documented. However, real progress beyond the acknowledgment of historical trauma has been minimal, disjointed, and without clear direction.

Child welfare continues to struggle to develop an accurate understanding the impact this historical genocide has and continues to have on Indigenous families. Fourth, this scoping review found support for the importance of connections and relationships regarding the concept of reunification for Indigenous children. Thus, centering the child within an Indigenous perspective shows respect, value, care, and priority of support that includes the family, extended family, and community. These connections allow the child a sense of belonging, identity and connection, to their place in the community, as well the reciprocity and responsibility of the family and community (Guilfoyle et al. 2010).

The fifth theme identified relates to the lack of meaningful research relating to reunification for Indigenous children. There is only sparse consideration of reunification for Indigenous children in child welfare research, the majority of which is from a western worldview, using western methods that do not fit Indigenous families. Unfortunately, current

research using Euro-western concepts of families have resulted in confusion over terms used and what is really being measured.

In the discussion of this paper, I used Blackstock's Breath of Life theory (Blackstock 2009, 2019) to look at reunification in child welfare using Indigenous ontology. In this way, reunification is considered through expanded concepts of the family to ensure children remain within the family system and in their home community. In using such a model, structural risks need to be addressed so that families have what they need to care for their children in their community, and that reunification is considered over a lifetime rather than simply while the child is in care. This theoretical perspective of reunification considers four dimensions (physical, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive) within the context of culture and heritage and considers how ancestral knowledge overlays all considerations of these dimensions. More importantly, balance is sought among the four dimensions over time.

We are in a time of truth and reconciliation with Indigenous people and communities, the concept of reunification is vital to not only the discussion of reconciliation in child welfare but also what actions the child welfare system takes. "Child welfare reform is necessary for reclaiming and maintaining healthy Indigenous communities, and cultural reclamation is necessary to successful child welfare" (Haight et al., 2018, p 408). Meaningful progress toward reconciliation needs to include the steps toward reunification for Indigenous families that includes funding to provide opportunities for reconnection for all Indigenous children and adults who were involved with child welfare historically. This would provide a reconnection to culture that is a step toward reclaiming the cultural identity and heritage vital for the healing of future generations of Indigenous children, families, and communities.

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Appendix
Article List –By Type

Legislative/Policy

Describes legislation relating to issues of reunification in child welfare in a particular geographical area
History that led to legislative changes
Some evaluative criteria around how or whether legislation does what it was intended/supposed to do.

	Authors	Title	Year	Location	Sample	Methods	Outcome/findings	Themes
3	Atwood, B	Achieving Permanency for American Indian and Alaska Native Children: Lessons from Tribal Traditions	2008	US	Legislation relating to Permanency for American Indian and Alaskan Native Children in the US (ICWA & ASFA)	Looks at case law and how these decisions speak to placements for children Provides case illustrations	Identifies alternative approaches to permanency under tribal law Concept of permanency as more fluid Difference in views on termination of parental rights Tribal concepts of open adoption, customary or traditional adoption, extended family care Recognition of state trauma	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
4	Andrews	"Active" versus "reasonable" efforts: the duties to reunify the family under the Indian Child Welfare Act and the Alaska Child in Need of Aid statutes	2002	United States Alaska	Alaskan Supreme court decisions with regard to duties imposed upon the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services to make efforts to reunify the family after child taken into state custody – since 1970	Analysis of decisions by the Alaska Supreme Court regarding the distinction between "active efforts", required under ICWA and "reasonable efforts", under ACNA (Alaskan Child in need of aid statues)	State legislation – duty to try to reunite with family Use of "active efforts" (vs. reasonable efforts) must be used with native children Reasonable/Active efforts – to preserve and reunify families First review of court decisions – decisions seem individual Other than one case (T.F), the court has applied a single standard (ongoing failure of parent to provide basic care that reflects unwillingness to serve as parent) consistently	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
5	Barth, Webster, Lee	Adoption of American Indian Children: Implications for Implementing the Indian Child Welfare	2002	California	Reviewed records of a cohort of children – less than 6 years of age and entered Out of Home care between Jan.	Logistic regression to compare children adopted to those still in care 4 years after entrance	Describes adoption of Native American children since implementation of the ICWA (Indian Child Welfare Act) and ASFA (Adoption and Safe Families Act).	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

		and Adoption and Safe Families Acts.			1988 to Dec. 31, 1992 Ethnicity identified	to out of Home care.	Permanency vs. Cultural connection – AI/AN children more likely to be adopted by relatives – highest of any ethnic group – most by Aunts and Uncles AI/AN children -longer time in care than other ethnicities AI/AN children who do not REUNIFY with family – only half as many were adopted as those than remained in care.	
7	Limb, Chance, Brown	An Empirical examination of the ICWA and its input on culture and family preservation for American Indian Children	2004	US	49 child welfare cases (Existing state records) Stratified sample	Reviewed case files, Interviewed tribal and protection workers	Case records suggest compliance with ICWA legislation. More than half were reunited with family members Workers didn't have clarity of ICWA legislation, but were generally compliant	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Connections/relationships**

15	Hill, L	Family Group Conferencing: An Alternative Approach to the Placement of Alaska Native Children under the Indian Child Welfare Act	2005	US	Indian Child Welfare Act Family Group Conferencing	Describes Family Group Conferencing and its fit with Alaskan Native population Outlines Indian Child Welfare Act Legislation	Advocates for the use of Family Group Conferencing as a way of meeting "active efforts" toward reunifying Alaskan Native children under the Indian Child Welfare Act. Advocates for the funding and creation of Family Group Conferencing services with Alaskan Native people	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

16	Cocks, J	Family Inclusive practice in child welfare: report of a Churchill Fellowship study tour	2019	Australia	Range of agencies and individuals in US, Canada, Norway, and UK over an 8-week period	Meetings, observations Review of literature provided by partners	Need to expand understanding of Family engagement in child welfare to increase reunification and to improve outcomes for children who do not return home Identified Six key practice and policy elements to	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

							implement family inclusive practice in child welfare	

26	John	Indigenous Resilience, Connectedness & reunification- From Root causes to root solutions	2016	Canada Ontario	First Nations community representatives from across the country Elected politicians, lawyers, judges, families	Travelled the province talked to those with direct role in matters relating to Indigenous children in care in BC. Asked about 3 topics related to indigenous child welfare: -Permanency for children/in care -Reduction of Indigenous children in care -Early years initiatives for indigenous children	Intergenerational trauma and its associated challenges need to be the focus Child as a member of their Indigenous community Identified 10 areas for focused action: Area 5 Reunification and Permanency planning	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

28	Commissioner for Children and Young People Victoria	Inquiry Into the implementation of the Children, Youth and Families Amendment (permanent care and other matters) Act. 2014 (Permanency Amendments Inquiry)	2016	Australia	Legislative Amendments from the Children Youth and Families Amendment (permanent Care and other matters) Act 2014. Government/ agency data	Review after six months, are (amendments) achieving their objectives; any unintended consequences? Guided by the best interests of the child principle; section 10 Children, Youth and Families Act 2005, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child	Have permanency amendments have had direct impact on outcomes for vulnerable children and families. Do permanency amendments lead to timelier permanent outcomes, including family preservation and family reunification. Have permanency amendments have strengthened cultural supports and planning for Aboriginal children Impact on child protection and other services Barriers Explanation of the process and	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

							provides guiding questions	

43	Krakouer, Wise, and Connolly	"We Live and Breathe Through Culture": Conceptualizing Cultural Connection for Indigenous Australian Children in Out of Home Care	2018	Australia	International Frameworks, Individual state legislation	Reviewed historical and contemporary legislative approaches to Indigenous child welfare in Australia	Need for a revised approach to policy & practice with Indigenous children that fosters cultural connection via improved attention to family relationships Prioritize family relationships to improve cultural connection, but also as a way to improve reunification. Cultural competency training for staff and carers look at Family differently (expansive) look at reunification different (expansive)	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

Programs/Evaluation

Mix of qualitative and quantitative
Describes a particular program
Evaluation on outcome measures
Policy and program recommendations

9	Bodor, Lamourex, Biggs	Bringing home the kids	2009	Canada	60 "in care" children, their case-workers, and their foster parents – opportunity to reconnect with their families, extended family, and home community	Community based children services staged an event designed to reconnect children in out of home care with their home communities through a one-day event of celebration and ceremony Use of kinship maps	Part of reunification is visitation, contact Many of these in care children taken from home communities far away with limited ability for contact Different views of kinship and community and how this increases attachment Connection to community and relations as healing, positive, hopeful	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

							Rooted in traditional teachings	

19	Metcalf	Family Reunion: Networks and treatment in a Native American Community	1979	US	Urban Indian Child Resource Center program	Description and analysis of Urban Indian Child Resource Center treatment model	International abuse versus individual pathology Program uses Culturally specific process to build networks for Urban Indian families	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

30	Deane, Glass, Vystreil-Apence, Mignone	Live-In Family Enhancement (LIFE): a comprehensive program for healing and family reunification	2018	Canada	Initial working group to inform 10 families, mentors, staff Review of agency documents	Utilization-focused evaluation approach Review of files Interviews with 8 families, mentors, staff	Indigenous agency in Manitoba – devised this approach where parents were fostered with their children Budget taken from foster care funds, rather than new funding Found lack of research on process of reunification (how to) Goal is to strengthen family to avoid child in care LIFE used this program for those families reunifying Virtually all found program valuable Six themes emerged	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

35	LaBoucane-Benson	Reconciliation, Repatriation & Reconnection: A Framework for Building Resilience in Canadian Indigenous Families.	2009	Canada	Case study of: In Search of Your Warrior Program	Research as Ceremony; Indigenous methods Interviews, sharing circles, Cree Elders Teaching Circles	Employed an indigenous worldview in a strength-based study to better understand the process of building Indigenous Family Resilience Create a framework for building Indigenous Family resilience – importance of	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

							ceremony, connection, relationships	

Experiential/Impact

Qualitative

Generally interviews, sometimes review of case files

Questions around an experience of an event, program, involvement

Identification of trauma and impact

Recommendations for policy and programs

8	Adam et al.	Birth of a Family	2017	Canada	Film	Follows a reunion as adults of 4 Dene siblings taken into foster care as part of the sixty's scoop and raised in different families	Three sisters and a brother, adopted as infants into separate families, meet together for the first time Now all in middle age each has grown up in different circumstances, with different family cultures, different values and no shared memories. Birth of a Family follows them through pain, trepidation and laughter as they work together to build their family	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

10	Rule, Rice	Bringing them home: Scorecard report 2015	2015	Australia	Bringing them home original report Stakeholders, past and present	Literature review-last 17 years Consulted with stakeholders Assessed each recommendation made in original report through a checklist	Original bringing them home report 17 years ago told stories of the stolen generations, the trauma and impact. Recommendations made for reparation Change delayed by government/political changes Other than the beginnings of apology, has not been much progress toward the recommendations – still high numbers of indigenous children in care	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

							Some increase in programs and services	

12	Landers, Morgan, Danes, Hawk	Does Reunification matter? Differences in the social connection to tribe and tribal enrollment of American Indian fostered and adopted adults	2018	US	129 American Indian Adults who experienced foster care and/or adoption during childhood	Used data from community based participatory research project called Experiences of Adopted & fostered individuals Target ed purposive sampling Recruitment through media/flyers	Social connection to tribe was significantly higher for those reunited than for those who had not Relationship between reunification and tribal enrollment was statistically significant Reunification was significantly associated with both social connection to tribe and increased likelihood of tribal enrollment. No other variables significant	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

17	Jackson, A	Family Reunification: The journey home	2007	Australia	5 families 38 individuals interviewed – workers, caregivers, parents	Qualitative, interpretive study Review of literature plus Interviews with 38 people from 5 families (workers, caregivers, parents) involved regarding their experiences of reunification	Development of Pathways to organize and categorize the process of reunification -too difficult to compare and use to inform practice – narrow definition of reunification -Perspective of interviewee seemed to depend on their role -Different goals of workers and caregivers and their varied perceptions of their goals -Identified critical themes in the research around reunification	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

22	Starr	First Nations Experiences with Adoption & Reunification:	2016	Canada	4 First Nations adults who experienced cross- cultural	Story telling Interviews	Similarities and differences in participants experiences identified	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual**

		A Family and Community process			adoption and reunification		From that – themes identified for future considerations	**Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
23	Toombs, Drawson, Bobinski, Dixon, Mushquash	First Nations parenting & Child reunification: Identifying strengths, Barriers, and community needs withing the child welfare system	2018	Canada	24 First Nations adults Questions were around child reunification, parenting, child well-being	Participatory action research partnership with a local First nations service delivery organization in Northwestern Ontario Semi structured interviews and focus groups/Questions developed in collaboration Blend of grounded theory and thematic analysis	6 themes identified Placement of children with extended families in home communities had the best outcomes Reunification can be increased by promoting capacity of parents and community	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

27	Mendes, Saunders, Baidawi	Indigenous Young People Transitioning from Out of Home Care in Victoria, Australia: The perspectives of Workers in Indigenous-specific and Non-Indigenous Non-Government Services	2016	Australia	32 individuals from 7 agencies (7 focus groups) Range of roles	Focus groups with individuals from Indigenous specific and non-Indigenous services working with Indigenous young people in and transitioning out of care Semi-structured interviews with Indigenous care leaders Identified themes	Examine current leaving care and post-care supports available to Indigenous care leavers Including the inter-relationship and consultation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous agencies delivering service Many indigenous children (similar to non-Indigenous children) return to family post care. Reunion was often seen to fail – potentially as there is an absence of supports	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

29	Wickham, M	Kwin Tsaniine Das Delh (Returning to the Home Fire): An Indigenous Reclamation	2008	Australia	7 adults One youth focus group	Initial meeting with clan to discuss research Purposeful sampling Semi structured interviews	Exploring experiences of Displaced people – those who have been in care Looks at reunification very broadly and as a form of decolonization	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

						Focus group with clan following interviews to bring back information	Reconnecting as a process and necessary for identity and to strengthen indigenous communities, children and families	

32	Jackson, McConachy	Neither here nor there – Revisiting Reunification	2014	Australia	Agency data 22 respondents 8 interviews	Qualitative and quantitative Reviewed files, case studies Interviews with workers/staff in various involved organizations	Limited quantitative data on reunification Importance of reunification – desired outcome when child comes into care, reduction of use of residential care Description of available programs and services related to reunification in Australia Presents the available information on reunification – literature review & outline of programs and services	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
33	Edmonds & Pequeneza	Next of Kin	2018	Canada	Film	Interview, filming with program manager, staff and participants of the program	Use of Family Finding to reconnect youth leaving care with family Tells story of an Indigenous youth trying to locate and expand family connections	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

Predictors

Mix of methods – qualitative/quantitative

Qualitative – looking at government and agency data to determine the who, what, where, why of reunification

Attempts to predict variables that could predict reunification

Also at times a qualitative piece that asks questions around participants experiences

1	Fernandez & Lee	Accomplishing Family Reunification for children in care: An Australian Study	2013	Australia	103 caseworkers 168 children from 96 families in care for the first time	Face to face interviews with caseworkers Thematic analysis to identify themes Asses use of standardized	52% children reunited NCFAS-R assessments at closure predicted reunification outcomes Odds of reunification increased proportionally with	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

						assessment tool – NCFAS-R	incremental improvements in strength ratings on all domains	

6	Delfabbro, Fernandez, McCormick, Ketter	An Analysis of Reunification from Out-of-Home Care in Three Australian States	2014	Australia	1337 children that entered out of home care between Jan. 2006 & Dec. 31, 2007 in 3 states in Australia 1 in 5 children were aboriginal	Looked at nature & predictors of family reunification in 3 states Analyzed case records Follow up interviews with case workers in 3 states in Victoria	Factors that predict reunification Reunification more probable in the short term Subtle differences between states Highlight importance of national interest within Australia to develop more uniform national data collection standards to allow trends to be more recognized at a national level	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

11	Fernandez, Delfabbro, Ramia, Kovacs	Children returning from care: The challenging circumstances of parents in poverty	2019	Australia	502 children entering care - Jan. 2006 to Dec. 2007 Just under 1/3 indigenous Look at reunification with particular reference to influence of poverty and other background factors	Exploratory analysis conducted in 3 stages -cluster analysis, relationship between background characteristics and variables for entering care Data review of characteristics – including indigenous status Cox regression – odds of being reunified vs. not	Most reunifications occur within 12 months Poverty/homelessness Predictors of lower probability of reunification status along with Indigenous status and family structure	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

14	Doab, Fowler, Dawson	Factors that influence mother-child reunification for mothers with a history of Substance	2015	Australia	Systematic review Structured search of 9 databases between	Narrative synthesis Examined factors that influence mother-child	Reunification rates varied among programs Very few indicated Indigeneity Need for substance use treatment that is	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

		use: A systematic review of the evidence to inform policy and practice in Australia			2004 and 2014 11 studies	reunification in mothers with substance use	readily available, accessible and free of stigma Treatment needs to be enhanced through comprehensive programs that address health in a holistic manner Studies reviewed were all from US and do not consider findings in relations to Indigenous communities	

18	Esposito, Trocme, Chabot, Colin-Vezinaa, Shlonsky, Sinha	Family reunification for placed children in Quebec, Canada: A longitudinal study	2014	Canada	Children admitted to out of home care between April 2002 and March 2011 Divided group into two - children 0 to 9 and 10 to 17 (at initial placement	Clinical administrative child protection date, merged with 2006 Canadian Census data for Quebec Cox proportional hazard regression analysis was used to examine the chances of reunification	Explored when reunification is most likely to occur and for whom Family reunification viewed more broadly and includes returning children to live with their natural families, including extended family members Younger children, specifically age 2 to 5 at time of initial placement had the lowest likelihood of returning to live with their natural families Concerns – race not identified in 15.7% of cases in study	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

20	Landers, Danes, Harstad, Hawk	Finding their way home: Factors associated with reunification for American Indian and White Adults	2017	US	295 American Indian and White Adults	Logistic Regression analysis to explore factors that contribute to the probability of Reunification.	Race is not a significant factor, contrary to prior research. Odds of reunification increased with age, having travelled through foster care and having experienced poly-victimization in foster or adoptive homes. Reunification rates decreased for those in poverty.	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

21	Landers, Danes, White Hawk	Finding their way home: The reunification of First Nations adoptees	2015	US	95 First Nation people that experienced adoption and/or foster care as children	Respondents contacted through community agencies, social media, purposeful sampling Retrospective survey asking about their experiences	Need to look at reunification as a broader concept – as a process Those participants who were older and identified a stronger connection to their tribe experienced a more satisfactory reunification Those reunifying with only their birth mother experienced less satisfaction, than with tribe as well Study was not able to identify why	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

25	Fidler, L	In Limbo: Exploring income and housing barriers for reunifying Tasmanian families	2018	Australia	Government and agency documents 15 academic experts 43 front line workers 5 parents 1 grandparent	Mixed methods Review of literature Face to face/skype interviews	Effects of poverty on families involved in the reunification process Reunification process to begin on day child comes into care Systemic barriers that contribute to poverty, and the impact on a family's ability to reunify Recommendations for policy and practice in Tasmania Less specific Indigenous voice	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

34	Delfabbri et al	Predictors of short-term reunification in South Australian substitute care	2003	Australia	235 Children from South Australian substitute care 1998 to 1999.	Proportional hazard analyses Profile analysis	Examines factors that contribute to short-term reunification Non-aboriginal children and those placed because of parental incapacity were significantly more likely to go home Neglected and Aboriginal children less likely to go home- consistent with previous research	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

37	Farmer, Southerlan	Returning Home in	2009	US	1778 youth experiencin	Data collected as part of larger	Patterns, predictors, and stability of	

	d, Mustillo, Burns	Systems of Care			g out of home placement from CMHS, 2001 data	national evaluation of the comprehensive Community mental health services for children and their families Regression models to examine predictors of reunification and stability of reunification	movement back home (reunification) from out of home placements. Found 61% moved back home and 22% of those reunited were placed out of the home again American Indian youth were least likely to return home Mental health and youth reunifying from treatment versus specific child protection involvement	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

39	Delfabbro, Fernandez, McCormick, Kettler	Reunification in a complete entry cohort: A longitudinal study of children entering out of home care in Tasmania, Australia	2013	Australia	468 children in out of home placement between Jan. 2006 and Dec. 2007	Computerized records Chi square analysis Interviews with Caseworkers	Consistent with other research – most reunifications occur within the first year, relatively few thereafter Smallest state in Australia – unsure if it can be generalized to the larger states which have very large metropolitan populations, a higher proportion of Aboriginal youth and greater socio-economic diversity	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
40	Landers, Bellamy, Danes, MCLuckie, Hawk	The Reunification of American Indian Children in Long Term Foster Care	2019	US	456 American Indian, African American and White children ages 2-15.	Nearest neighbor propensity score matching to estimate the effect of race on reunification at 18 mos. and 36 mos. Logistic regression analysis to explore factors associated with reunification including race.	Reunification rates do not differ after controlling for race. Lower rates for American Indian Children in some studies may be better explained by variables other than race.	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
42	Delfabbro, Borgas, Rogers, Jeffreys, Wilson	The social and family backgrounds of infants in South	2008	Australia	1155 infants taken into care aged-0-2	Sample included overrepresentation of aboriginal infants (9-10	Purpose was to provide a detailed profile of the social and family background of a	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual**

		Australian out of home care 2000-2005: Predictors of subsequent abuse notifications			Used a random sample of 498 of these infants	times) the population average Chi-square analysis to compare age, gender, area and ethnicity profile	cohort of infants entering care for the first time in Australia Examines infant's destination in the care system, examine the extent to which family background factors can be used to predict the likelihood of subsequent notification of abuse for these children Most infants experienced small number of placements, over half still at home when study completed Many still at home had subsequent referrals to child welfare	**Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

Comparative

Compares Indigenous population experience with non-Aboriginal

Mixed methods used, both qualitative and quantitative

38	Landers, A	Reunification and Behavioural Problems of American Indian Children in the Child Welfare System	2016	US	456 children in long term foster care 44 American Indian 227 African American 185 Caucasian	Children in care July 1998 to Feb. 1999 Data taken from National Survey of Child and Adolescent well-being	First study to compare reunification for American Indian children and children of other races in out of home care -as compared to Caucasian & African American children Effect of race, not significant	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**
44	Blackstock, C	When Everything Matters: Comparing the experiences of First Nations and Non-aboriginal children	2009	Canada	Government data - Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Agency data	Pilot testing of data Training on instruments Site review of agency records Data collection over a five-week period Sept.	Little research for indigenous children after they enter care Poorer families living in poorer housing are overrepresented among those having children removed: lack of services provided	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

		removed from their families in Nova Scotia from 2003 to 2005				2008 to Oct. 2008 Cross-tabulations were used to compare the characteristics of First Nations and non-First Nations children who are reunified with children who continue placement in child welfare.	-Re-imaginings structural risk; looking at structural inequities -Discussed Breath of Life Theory as a way of contextualizing child welfare interventions – with a focus on restoring balance among the relationship worldview principles -racial bias in child welfare -Reunification meant different things in the -First Nations children are 4-6 times more likely to be removed as non-Aboriginal children in Nova Scotia 2003 to 2005 -Significant service differences between first nations and non-Aboriginal children	

Process

how reunification took place

participant's experience of the process

generally mixed methods with some qualitative and some quantitative data

2	Fernandez, E	Accomplishing Permanency: Reunification Pathways and outcomes for Foster Children	2013	Australia	168 children 96 families	Prospective longitudinal design Mixed methods approach Semi-structured face to face interviews with caseworkers, carers and birth parents Asked about decisions on placement and reunification	E book Exploring the process, outcomes and potential of reunification decision making To inform policy and practice Themes identified	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

41	Ankersmit	The Reunification Partnership: Engaging Birth Parents and Foster Carers as Collaborators	2016	Australia	In depth interviews with 6 caseworkers from 5 locations in New South Wales	Qualitative, interpretive study Asked protection workers perceptions, perspectives & experiences of	reunification <u>process</u> Factors that influence the development of Collaboration - trust, motivation and willingness, knowledge and agreement as key factors	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

		in Restoration Casework				collaboration between parents and carers	strategies that promote collaboration which is seen as key factor in success of efforts to reunite collaborative relationship between parents and carers facilitated through casework practice to improve reunification	

Literature Review

Reviews available research relating to a particular topic in Indigenous reunification
Describes available literature
Identifies themes
Identifies gaps in research
Indicates areas for future research

13	Costa, T	Factors for Restoration of Children to their Families after Final Care Orders Have Been Made	2016	Australia	peer reviewed journals found in several databases Search of legislation Terms used – reunification, restoration, abuse, foster care etc.	Literature review 34 Peer reviewed articles	Identified length of time in care, issues related to attachment, parenting capacity and placement stability as key factors for determining suitability of restoration to families Most literature refers to children in temporary care Identified gap in research of children who return home after final care orders have been made	**Indigenous ways of knowing Trauma/reconciliation Structural vs. individual Connections/relationships Indigenous Research**

24	Landers, Ashley and Danes, S.	Forgotten children: A critical review of the reunification of American Indian Children in the child welfare system	2016	US	Literature from the last 15 years	Critical review of literature on the predictors of reunification inclusive of American Indian Families.	Outcome factors associated with reunification for American Indians is helpful, but without consistent inclusion of child, parent, family and case related variables across statistical analysis, limited conclusions can be drawn. Further – limited band, tribe level information is	**Indigenous ways of knowing Trauma/reconciliation Structural vs. individual Connections/relationships Indigenous Research**

							known, and this could be important.	

36	Chewka	Repatriating Canada's Indigenous Children: Planning for the future	2009	Canada	Literature review	Discussed Rational for repatriation of Indigenous children and youth to their communities of origin, issues concerning current repatriation efforts, what needs to be done	Repatriation of Indigenous children to their community of origin as a complicated, issue Current research in Alberta does not support a clear plan for repatriation Returning a child home is not enough The longer a child remains separated from their family and community – affects identity Explores barriers to repatriation or returning and need for resources Recommendations – acknowledging past efforts, but need increased funding and research Need for a broader definition of repatriation	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

Theoretical/Ontology

Describes theories around reunification research, evaluation, ontology

Recommendations around use of theory to understand, and to inform policy and practice level interventions

31	Toombs, Drawson, Chambers, Bobinski, Dixon	Moving Toward an Indigenous Research Process: A Reflexive Approach to Empirical Work with First Nations Communities in Canada	2019	Canada	Re analyzed prior qualitative Study of Indigenous reunification 24 First Nations adults	This is a further analysis of the results to improve perceived meaningfulness and relevance to the community. Results situated in an Indigenous framework of wellbeing	Initial study done in collaboration with Indigenous community Initial results were deemed relevant by partnering community, but stakeholders reported that they did not reflect all community values. Focus on deficits in Western research doesn't fit with wellness focus of Indigenous communities	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**

							Reframed the results in the wellness perspective, to better fit community need	

44	Blackstock, C	When Everything Matters: Comparing the experiences of First Nations and Non-aboriginal children removed from their families in Nova Scotia from 2003 to 2005	2009	Canada	Government data - Canadian Incidence Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect Agency data	Pilot testing of data Training on instruments Site review of agency records Data collection over a five-week period Sept. 2008 to Oct. 2008 Cross-tabulations were used to compare the characteristics of First Nations and non-First Nations children who are reunified with children who continue placement in child welfare.	Little research for indigenous children after they enter care Poorer families living in poorer housing are overrepresented among those having children removed: lack of services provided -Re-imaginings structural risk; looking at structural inequities -Discussed Breath of Life Theory as a way of contextualizing child welfare interventions – with a focus on restoring balance among the relationship worldview principles -racial bias in child welfare -Reunification meant different things in the -First Nations children are 4-6 times more likely to be removed as non-Aboriginal children in Nova Scotia 2003 to 2005 -Significant service differences between first nations and non-Aboriginal children	**Indigenous ways of knowing** **Trauma/reconciliation** **Structural vs. individual** **Connections/relationships** **Indigenous Research**