

Running head: TOWARD A DECOLONIZING FRAMEWORK

The Place for Indigenous Knowledge in a Sport for Development Program

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Thesis submitted to the  
Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the M.A. degree in Human Kinetics

Human Kinetics  
Faculty of Health Sciences  
University of Ottawa

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### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, it is a genuine pleasure to express my deepest appreciation to my thesis supervisor, Dr. Alexandra Arellano. Thank you for believing in me, supporting me, and empowering me to do my best even in the most difficult times. This year has been a rollercoaster ride for me, and I genuinely could not have completed this degree without your generous guidance, understanding, and support. Thank you.

I also wish to thank my two thesis committee members Christine Dallaire and Willow Scobie for their insightful guidance during my degree.

Next, I want to thank my parents, who immigrated from war-torn countries so that I could have this education, which I will never take for granted.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my best friend Avi. Thank you for always being a source of support and encouragement, as well as for believing in me even during the times that I found it difficult to believe in myself.

**Abstract**

This thesis contains two stand-alone articles for which the overall purpose is to learn from the experiences of a non-Indigenous SFD program designed for Indigenous youth, by exploring how the program has dealt with questions of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and worldviews. By looking at how the program officers and managers articulate their experiences and challenges within the different phases of designing, managing and implementing the SFD program, this study examines questions of decolonization, Indigenization, and resurgence. The first article utilizes an Indigenous resurgence lens to explore the challenges of running the Promoting Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program through the reflective discourses of middle-upper level management staff members. The main objectives of the first article are to 1) explore the perception of the PLAY staff on challenges experienced within program design and development generally, 2) analyze those challenges in light of critical research on SFD, and 3) inform program development with Indigenous youth. In the second article, I examine the experiences and perceptions of the staff and in dealing more specifically with the question of culture and Indigenous knowledge and Indigenization. This article highlights the experiences that occurred during a two-year period of Indigenous leadership, two years after the piloting of the program. The objectives of this article are to 1) consider and examine the place of culture within SFD for Indigenous youth 2) highlight and learn from Indigenous leadership experience in a Western-based program 3) inform program development.

**Keywords:** Sport for development, Resurgence, Self-Determination, Indigenous Leadership

## Introduction

In 1998, two years after the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RRCAP), Canada issued its first statement of reconciliation to residential school survivors and began its journey into the age of reconciliation by investing \$350 million to establish the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). This organization was the first government attempt to support Indigenous healing through a community-based initiative (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). In that same year, the first limited apology, which only addressed the legacy of sexual and physical abuse in residential schools, was read out in a government meeting room in Ottawa (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). However, Indigenous communities deemed this apology insufficient compensation for the atrocities that residential school survivors faced. As a result, in 2007, the government of Canada committed itself to starting a journey of reconciliation with Indigenous Canadians by signing the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The IRSSA promised Indigenous Canadians a government apology, a reparations program, and a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The limited 1998 apology evolved into a full apology by the former Prime Minister Stephen Harper in 2008, who further addressed the “abuse, suffering, and generational and cultural dislocation that resulted from assimilative, government-sanctioned residential schools” (Parrott, 2014, para. 1). Today, the TRC of Canada is dedicated to further supporting Indigenous healing and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples by creating a relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. As such, the commission created 10 principles and produced several recommendations in order to facilitate the reconciliation efforts. The 8<sup>th</sup> principle specifically recognizes that “supporting Indigenous peoples’ cultural revitalization and integrating Indigenous knowledge systems, oral histories,

laws, protocols, and connections to the land into the reconciliation process are essential” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.10). In addition to the 10 principles, the commission also produced several recommendations, which included 94 calls for action, five of which focused on sport development and related practices, such as sport inclusiveness, sport policy, and sport history and education (Gardam, Giles, & Hayhurst, 2017). While the commission’s work provided an incentive for the use of sport as a catalyst for social change in Indigenous communities (Arellano & Downey, 2018), our interest is to explore the role and importance of Indigenous culture within Indigenous sports and sport related practices designed to empower Indigenous communities. For the purpose of this research, culture is defined as the “Indigenous Knowledge systems, oral histories, laws, protocols and land connections” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p.10) as outlined by the principles of reconciliation. The commitment to reconciliation encourages SFD organizations designed for Indigenous youth to carefully reflect upon their practices in order to ensure that their work is grounded in Indigenous values and respectful of Indigenous ways and knowledge systems.

### **Thesis Framework**

This thesis contains two stand-alone articles for which the overall purpose is to learn from the experiences of a non-Indigenous SFD program designed for Indigenous youth, by exploring how the program has dealt with questions of Indigenous knowledge, culture, and worldviews. By looking at how the program officers and managers articulate their experiences and challenges within the different phases of designing, managing and implementing the SFD program, this study examines questions of decolonization, Indigenization, and resurgence. The first article utilizes an Indigenous resurgence lens to explore the challenges of running the Promoting Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program through the reflective discourses of

middle-upper level management staff members. The main objectives of the first article are to 1) explore the perception of the PLAY staff on challenges experienced within program design and development generally, 2) analyze those challenges in light of critical research on SFD, and 3) inform program development with Indigenous youth. In the second article, I examine the experiences and perceptions of the staff and in dealing more specifically with the question of culture and Indigenous knowledge and Indigenization. This article highlights the experiences that occurred during a two-year period of Indigenous leadership, two years after the piloting of the program. The objectives of this article are to 1) consider and examine the place of culture within SFD for Indigenous youth 2) highlight and learn from Indigenous leadership experience in a Western-based program 3) inform program development.

### **The Promoting Life-skill in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program**

Right To Play is an international organization that aims to educate and “empower” children and youth using sport as a medium (PLAY, 2019). One of their programs, the Promoting Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) has a mission to “promote healthy living, healthy relationships, education, and employability life skills” (PLAY, 2019) in Indigenous communities. Each participating community applies to partner with RTP through a selection process in which the participating communities commit to hiring a local community mentor that will be trained by RTP and paying at least half of the mentor’s salary, providing a safe space for the program to take place, hosting PLAY team members during visits, and generally supporting the community mentor with various local resources. Four core programs are available (Youth Leadership, After School, PLAY for Diabetes Prevention, and Sport for Development, based on soccer, hockey, baseball and lacrosse) in combination with complementary programs (e.g., sport clinics, Kwe programs for women and girls). In addition to the local program components, all

participant communities are invited and funded to take part to several major special events and gatherings with strong capacity building and training features (the bi-annual community mentor training week, the annual youth symposium and several other more sporadic training and sport certification clinics). While the Youth Leadership Program component was central from 2011 until 2014, today, each community evolves through the partnership by customizing core and complementary components based on their own needs and interests (PLAY, 2018).

### **Research Partnership Context**

In 2010–11, a research partnership was signed by the University of Ottawa School of Human Kinetics, Right To Play, and two Cree partner communities that led to a Sport Canada–funded research program (SSHRC). Entitled “Building Meaningful Programs for Indigenous Youth”, the overall objective of the research was to foster more meaningful and relevant sport- and recreation-based programs for Indigenous youth through the analysis of a series of multidisciplinary case studies (see for example Arellano & Downey, 2018; Arellano et al., 2018; Kope & Arellano 2016; Halsall & Forneris, 2016). Within this university–organization–community partnership, the researchers took part in several studies partnering with Right To Play and participated in five years of PLAY programming. The research team participated actively in several bi-annual community mentors training weeks, youth symposiums, and a series of community visits while partnering, mainly, with five Indigenous communities. Over the years, researchers have been committed to sharing their observations and data collection with these partners while producing several research and trip reports, collaborating on the monitoring and evaluation team of the PLAY program, and sharing their findings with the organization and community partners. The research team conducted over 100 interviews with several different stakeholders (including youth, community members, parents, community mentors, PLAY staff,

Right To Play staff, and other partner organization members), spent over 120 days participating in PLAY gatherings, and helped implement the PLAY program in five different communities.

For this specific research, secondary data provided by this overall project was used to answer this thesis' research purpose. More particularly, knowing that the PLAY program was first piloted at the end of 2010, this thesis is interested in year 2012-2014 of the program, when it experienced important and rapid changes, and when the PLAY team was confronted to the question of culture and main program objective adjustments. The data for this period, in addition to field notes and reports is mainly based on interviews to RTP Toronto main office staff, the main team in charge of program management. The semi-structured interviews are very meaningful and reflect a very interesting and informative phase in building a meaningful program for Indigenous youth.

### **Positionality Statement**

My name is Mariana Essa. I was born and spent my childhood in the Middle East, a region that was under the stress of colonization for many years. I became a Canadian citizen some years ago, as my family was looking for a better life, and I have now received Canadian citizenship. I learned from Canadian values of democracy and embraced the privileged lifestyle of living in North America. I embraced the culture since this was the land that welcomed us, and I aspired to become a good citizen. I am now a Canadian; therefore, I have also become a settler. Since I began learning about Indigenous issues, my perspective on Canadian values and Canadian-ness have become much more critical as I have learned from the history of oppression of Indigenous peoples and, in turn, about colonialism, Indigenous rights, and land-claim issues that are at the root of Indigenous conflicts. Leanne Simpson, an Indigenous scholar, has called on Indigenous academics who wish to become allies to Indigenous peoples to “step outside of their

privileged positions and challenge research that conforms to the guidelines outlined by the colonial power structure and root their work in the politics of decolonization and anticolonialism” (p. 381). I recognize my privileged position as a middle-class scholar studying in a master’s degree program at a Canadian university. At the same time, I see myself as a settler, and through these studies, I am working on myself to serve Indigenous struggles and resurgence, as well as to become a good ally. I know that this requires life- long self-reflection, education, and understanding. As a beginner in the field, I am maybe naive and unexperienced, but the writing of Indigenous intellectuals inspires me and touches me. I have read and synthesized the work of Indigenous scholars with the hopes of serving Indigenous resurgence.

## **Chapter 1:**

### **Review of literature, conceptual framework and methodology**

This section highlights the literature on challenges surrounding SFD, and provides an understanding of Indigenous Knowledge, Indigenous healing and Indigenous leadership. It then discusses settler colonial theory and Indigenous resurgence through a lens grounded in Indigenous studies. Next, the epistemological and methodological frameworks which will guide the thesis are described. I explain the rationale behind utilizing a subjectivist epistemological framework, situate myself within the research and explain how Indigenous methodologies and the words of Indigenous scholars helped guide my analysis. Finally, the section closes by explaining the methods and analysis that will be employed throughout the thesis.

### **Sport for Development (SFD)**

A body of highly critical sociological literature has assessed the SFD platform (Hayhurst, 2014; Darnell, 2010; Nicholls et.al., 2010). Despite the varying frameworks employed in the analysis of the challenges surrounding SFD, the literature highlights the power tensions which surround its platform (Nicholls et.al, 2011). Darnell (2007) assessed the SFD platform through a Foucauldian lens and suggested that the discourses of sport and development promote the “reconstruction of Whiteness as a standpoint of racialized privilege. That is, through sport for development, whiteness is (re) confirmed as an intelligible and recognizable subject position, one characterized as benevolent, rational and expert” (p. 16). Darnell argued that due to the hegemony of neoliberalism, “even the most progressive or radical SDP initiatives tend to understand the central chore of SDP as one of securing neoliberal conduct that eschews state support and chooses not to challenge structural or transnational inequality” (p. 93).

Through the lens of postcolonial feminism, Hayhurst (2014) critiqued the reproduction of “westernized forms of girlhood”, which were imposed by an SFD initiative that aimed to empower young girls and women in Uganda using the sport of Martial Arts as medium. She suggested that despite the perceived benefits of program involvement which included an increase in confidence levels among participants, the program curriculum reproduced western values and belief systems, discounting larger social issues which Ugandan girls and women must face.

In that regard, Darnell (2014) asserted that based on a neoliberal system and related values, such programs are said to focus more on the logic of character development and personal achievement that is constituent of a hypercompetitive world, and they are discounting social issues and the need for progressive change at a collective or community level (Coakley, 2011, p.308; Darnell, 2010b; Kay, 2009; Hayhurst et.al., 2016).

### **Sport for Development in Indigenous Communities**

In a similar fashion, the critique around sport and recreation programs for Indigenous populations in Canada has a lot in common with the critical appraisal of the concept of development and related practices that work to modernize sport as “universal” (Darnell, 2007).

Hayhurst et.al (2013) as well as Nicholls et. al (2010) critiqued the neo-liberal system through which SFD programs designed for Indigenous youth operates, and for these scholars, the lack of genuine co-creation of knowledge in SFD programming is due to the fact that the sport for development platform is a highly competitive one that is driven by unequal power relations, as well as corporate and stakeholder needs. This system of unequal power relations creates constant tensions and shifts between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ strategies. Research has shown that bottom-up initiatives work best to encourage local agency/ self determination in indigenous

communities, but the neo-liberal system through which SFD operates makes it difficult for the program to stick to a bottom up operation strategy (Black 2010; Darnell, 2014).

According to Briggs & Sharpp (2010), development institutions rarely draw upon Indigenous knowledge through the inclusion of local voices in the construction of formal top-down development initiatives. They argue that a sustainable community development initiative “should take into consideration the greater account of the specificities of local conditions, the knowledge of a population who have lived experience of the environments in question and provide peoples with ownership of the development process” (p. 9). Building upon the work of Lincoln & Denzin (2008), Hayhurst & Darnell (2011) argued for the need of a “decolonization praxis” which questions and challenges “those institutions, practices and ideas that promote and sustain material inequalities and Western power, as well as regularly misrepresent, essentialize and ignore the voices, agency and identities of local persons” (Hayhurst & Darnell, 2011; Lincoln & Denzin, 2008). As Hayhurst et.al (2016) argued, SDP programs should be led by Indigenous peoples and fundamentally shaped by “Indigenous voices, epistemologies, concerns and standpoints” (P. 1).

### **Indigenous Knowledge**

European colonization of Indigenous land has devalued Indigenous knowledge and characterized the Eurocentric lifestyle as being superior. Mi’kawi scholar Battiste has contended that Indigenous ways of knowing have been severely misrepresented due to “knowledge produced from the West constituting a form of imperialism that disregards and erases other types of knowledge” (as cited in Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016, p. 5). Indigenous knowledge is not gained by means of a scientific process that works through gathering, analyzing, and categorizing experimental evidence to turn them into facts of life; it is instead “handed down

through generations by cultural transmission about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment” (Berkes, 2008, p. 9). The mainstreaming of Western knowledge as universal and superior has caused Indigenous knowledge to be “understood as being in binary opposition to ‘scientific,’ ‘Western,’ ‘Eurocentric,’ or ‘modern’ knowledge” (Battiste, 2005, p. 2). To the Eurocentric thinkers, this means that this knowledge is not legitimized and thus cannot be used to solve problems in the modern world (Battiste, 2005). Furthermore, a lack of genuine co-creation of knowledge is still prominent within present-day SFD programs (Nicholls et al., 2011), as development has become a replacement term for social control and assimilation (Coackley & Donnelly, 2007). According to Briggs and Sharp (2004), development institutions rarely draw upon Indigenous knowledge through the inclusion of local voices in the construction of formal top-down development initiatives. They asserted that a sustainable community development initiative “should take into consideration the greater account of the specificities of local conditions, the knowledge of a population who have lived experience of the environments in question and provide peoples with ownership of the development process” (p. 9). Building upon the work of Lincoln and Denzin (2008), Hayhurst and Darnell (2011) have argued for the need of a “decolonization praxis” that questions and challenges “those institutions, practices, and ideas that promote and sustain material inequalities and Western power, as well as regularly misrepresent, essentialize, and ignore the voices, agency, and identities of local persons” (Hayhurst & Darnell, 2011; Lincoln & Denzin, 2008). Hayhurst, Giles, and Wright (2016) also contended that SFD programs should be led by Indigenous peoples and fundamentally shaped by “Indigenous voices, epistemologies, concerns, and standpoints” (p. 1).

### **Indigenous Healing**

Researchers have demonstrated that Indigenous traditional culture is at the heart of healing and well-being for Indigenous populations (Barker, Goodman, & Debeck, 2017). Green (2010) examined the role of Indigenous traditional culture for Indigenous healing and argued that the concepts of culture and spiritual values offer crucial therapeutic and healing benefits for Indigenous North Americans. She further explained that Indigenous healing practices are “holistic,” meaning that they consider all elements of a person’s well-being, including the social, spiritual, psychological, and physical aspects of well-being for individuals and the community (Green, 2010). In that sense, Indigenous healing is deeply connected to holistic well-being, which considers not only individual well-being but also perceived feelings of belonging in the community. As such, she concluded that Indigenous traditional practices that involve cultural “symbols, acts, words, and objects” and community ‘empathy and support’ are essential elements for Indigenous healing. In terms of Indigenous youth development, the Government of Canada recognized that a strong cultural identity equals having a sense of belonging, which is key to healthy development (Government of Canada, 2013). In that respect, the government specifically recognized that having a strong sense of cultural identity helps to build resilience, defined as the ability to deal with and adapt in times of adversity (Government of Canada, 2013). In terms of youth resiliency, Wexler (2009) explained that Indigenous cultural identity increases resiliency and well-being in Indigenous youth by providing a sense of “belonging, purpose, and connection” (p. 270). Research has also revealed that having a strong cultural connection is linked to suicide prevention and decreased levels of self-destructive behavior among Indigenous youth, suggesting that “failures to achieve any viable sense of self or cultural continuity are strongly linked to self-destructive and suicidal behaviors” (Hallett, Chandler, & Lalonde, 2007, p. 394; see also Chandler & Lalonde, 2008). Overall, there is evidence to suggest that having a

strong connection to culture provides a sense of identity and belonging, which helps to foster resiliency and leads to positive youth development for Indigenous youth (Snowshoe et al., 2015). This finding supports the idea that SFD programs designed to empower Indigenous youth should make a commitment to contribute to Indigenous cultural restoration. Indigenous leadership.

### **Indigenous Leadership**

Mirroring Indigenous communities' views regarding healing, their leadership styles also tend to embrace rather holistic approaches. While Indigenous knowledge is gained through holistic, subjective measures, such as oral transmission and environmental interaction, leadership in Indigenous communities is based on "characteristics of the land and needs of the people in their traditional territories for many years prior to colonization" (Kenny, 2015, p. 2). Unlike a hierarchical Western leadership style, Indigenous leadership is "paved with land, ancestors, elders and story concepts that are rarely mentioned in the mainstream leadership literature" (Kenny, 2015, p. 2). Indigenous leadership is not grounded in the exercise of power by one individual over another; instead, it focuses on guidance through an integrative process that seeks to understand humanity from a holistic point of view through different lenses and perceptions. Julien, Wright, and Zinni (2010) mentioned six different characteristics of Indigenous leadership: It focuses on integrating the community with nature; connects rather than divides; supports social order through harmony in relationships among people and fosters spirituality; maintains values and cooperative behavior for the greater good of the whole (e.g., honesty and integrity in relationships); and seeks consensus among all members. Thus, the leadership of Indigenous organizations is more flexible and less hierarchical in nature, with the human being's spirituality and wellness as the main focus. Unlike mainstream leadership, Indigenous leadership considers holistic well-being, including physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being (Julien et al.,

2010). Therefore, a hierarchal leadership structure that is hungry for and focused on quick quantifiable results is seen as incompatible with accountability to the communities, co-created knowledge, and Indigenous ways of life (Nicholls et al., 2011).

### **Theoretical Approach**

#### **Settler-Colonialism and Indigenous Resurgence Framework**

Settler Colonialism draws from Postcolonial theory which looks at histories of fights against racism, colonialism and general political struggles where scholars such as Said and Spivak have sought to understand oppression of colonized peoples and their cultures. Settler colonialism distinguishes itself from Postcolonial theory in that it frames land as the epistemological core of Indigenous life and well-being (Alfred, 2014; Simpson, 2011), and places the issue of land dispossession at the center of oppression and control. As such, Indigenous scholars have asserted that settler-colonialism is the Indigenous postcolonial framework that should be applied in any research with Indigenous peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

From an Indigenous perspective, decolonization refers to self-determination and resurgence (Battiste, 2005; Wilson, 2004; Tuck & Yang, 2012), where decolonization specifically requires the “repatriation of Indigenous land, Knowledge, and life” (Tuck & Yang, p. 21) and the recovery of “Indigenous self-determination” (Simpson, 2004, p. 375). From a non-Indigenous perspective, Regan (2010), argues that because land relationship is at the core of Indigenous epistemologies and Knowledge, programs, research or commissions that do not address the land issue tend to reproduce the status quo by reproducing the solving of “the Indian problem”. She argues that decolonization is about reconsidering the “good intentions” to fix “the Indian problem” by re-centering the colonial status quo as “the settler problem”.

### **Epistemology**

Subjectivism is the epistemic frame most appropriate for this type of qualitative research. Subjectivism entails an ontological claim about meaning, in which “meaning does not come out of interplay between subject and object and is imposed on the object by the subject” (Crotty, 1985, p. 9). As the literature review highlights, the main purpose of the research is to begin to understand Indigenous leadership and knowledge and their significance for Indigenous communities. To achieve that goal, it will be important to use a theory that encourages the idea that no universal truth exists. Subjectivism is an epistemological perspective that holds that there is no universal or objective truth; instead, many truths may exist, and as Crotty has suggested, meaning can be created out of nothing (Crotty, 1985).

## **Methodology**

### **Indigenous Methodologies**

This research engages with Indigenous methodologies. According to Smith (1999), Indigenous methodologies tend to approach “cultural protocols, values, and behaviors as an integral part of methodology” (p. 15). In order to use Indigenous methodologies, one must privilege and honor Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, values, and voices (Kovach, 2010). Indigenous methodology seeks to privilege Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing. For Ray (2012), a post-positivist understanding differs substantially from an Anishnaabe understanding of knowledge. She explained that

from an Anishnaabe paradigm, the belief is held that knowledge can not only be obtained through social relationships, but there is also an emphasis on a spiritual context. This understanding derives from the belief that the basis of knowledge is not social but spiritual. The difference between knowledge as socially derived opposed to spiritually derived has implications in regard to the treatment of knowledge. (p. 10)

Being non-Indigenous makes it difficult to commit to Indigenous methodologies. However, Indigenous research has established some principles that were used to orient this work. As explained by Chillisa (2012), Indigenous research proposes decolonizing Western-based research and Indigenization components that are important to address. A postcolonial Indigenous framework would therefore honor ways of knowing and representing traditionally excluded from Euro-Western thought, such as those of the colonized, oppressed, or Indigenous peoples.

Such a framework would thus avoid contributing to “perpetuating the self-serving Western research paradigms that construct Western ways of knowing as superior to the other’s ways of knowing” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 7). A first step in the right direction would require honoring what is sometimes referred to as the four “Rs” of Indigenous research: responsibility, respect, reciprocity, and the rights and regulations of the researched (Ellis & Earley, 2006). *Responsibility* refers to the researcher’s accountability to the communities, their worldviews, and their interests, but it also refers to their responsibility for the impacts of the research (Snow et al., 2016). *Respect* leads the researcher toward the idea of sharing knowledge, results, and findings; *reciprocity* requires a balance of power between the researcher and the community that should empower the participants and encourage a more horizontal relationship (Snow et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). *Rights and regulations* raise the issues of Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination and the ethics of research (Wilson, 2008). Particular attention to Indigenous knowledge protection and to appropriate methodological tools should therefore be at the heart of empowering Indigenous research. Non-Indigenous researchers must understand the role of colonization, their personal privilege, and what perpetuates oppression and Western ways of knowing (Chilisa, 2012). In Snow et al.’s (2016) words, “while non-Indigenous researchers cannot identify as Indigenous, they can move toward greater empathy for historical and current

struggles associated with colonization and create change in the research process, which also allows space for Indigenous researchers to employ and/or develop Indigenous methodologies” (p. 362).

With these considerations in mind, I strove to let the words of Indigenous scholars guide this research. As Simpson (2011) explained, non-Indigenous researchers who wish to be allies to Indigenous peoples must orient their work within an anti-colonial framework. This understanding led me to read the work of Indigenous scholars in order to gain an understanding of Indigenous worldviews and struggles with the hopes of contributing to the literature in a way that serves Indigenous resurgence and opposes colonial structures. While this work cannot draw directly from Indigenous knowledge systems that are embodied in language, stories, experiences, I engage with Indigenous research and authors in Indigenous studies and by making the effort of conducting “respectful, ethical, correct, sympathetic, useful and beneficial” (Prosanger, 2004; pp.107-108) research from the point of view of Indigenous peoples.

### **Methods**

This study consists of an analysis of secondary data collected from the research program “Building Meaningful Sport Programs for Indigenous Youth” (2012-2014). Secondary data analysis is a process that involves using previously existing data to answer new research questions (Dunn et al., 2015). The use of secondary data increases the feasibility of the research process by reducing the time and costs required (Dunn et al., 2015). At the same time, a secondary analysis of existing qualitative data can bring new perspectives to the existing data, which may produce important new research findings (Ritchie et al., 2013). I analyze secondary data from 10 semi-structured interviews collected by the Principal Investigator of the previous research program, to middle/upper management staff members of PLAY. The interviews lasted

20-180 minutes; 9 interviews were collected from non-Indigenous participants and one 2.5-hour long interview collected from an Indigenous woman that held the title “Deputy Director” for 1.5 years in the program. In a semi-structured interview,

the researcher asks a series of open-ended questions, with accompanying queries that probe for more detailed and contextual data. Respondents’ answers provide rich, in-depth information that helps us to understand the unique as well as shared circumstances in which they live, and meanings attributed to their experiences. When several research questions need answering, the semi-structured, long interview is an ideal way to collect data (Piercy, 2004, p. 1).

In qualitative research, the researchers may record field notes in order to “enhance data and provide rich context for analysis” (Phillip & Lauderdale, 2017, p. 1). This research project is guided by field notes, which were collected from the research program “Building Meaningful Sport Programs for Indigenous Youth” (2012-2014). Field notes as well as previous reports, studies were provided by the PI who led the research team. These additional documents provided rich insight into the communities, as well as day to day operations of the PLAY program and helped to guide the analysis of this thesis.

### **Secondary Data Analysis**

I began working with the secondary data that was collected from the “Building Meaningful Sport Programs for Indigenous Youth” (2012-2014) in 2017, which was the final year of my Honours Bachelor with Specialization in Human Kinetics. In that year, I used the data to complete an Honours project for which I composed one article which explored the question of culture within an SFD program. Through conversation with my supervisor, who was the principal investigator of the main research program, I understood that the research team wanted

to address the question of culture, as it was included in the interview guide, and decided to complete my Honours project using this data. As such, in 2017, I listened to the interviews, read the transcripts and looked at previous analysis of the interviews. Throughout this MA degree, I have intensified and refined my analysis and reworked the overall data to develop and refine the questions which based my first and second article. As such, the two questions were selected after a long process of immersing myself in the data, through conversations with the PI, reading other research articles, reports and posters from this wider project.

Overall, my part in the larger research program ‘Building Meaningful Sport Programs for Indigenous Youth’ was to document the cultural encounter from a perspective, which highlights the need to create space for Indigenous Knowledge in SFD programs designed for Indigenous youth.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study received ethical clearance from the University of Ottawa’s Office of Research Ethics and Integrity. This certificate validates the fact this data and overall research questions were already integrated within the previous research purpose and were therefore not necessarily new to the purpose of the main research project. This allowed me to use this anonymized data to conduct my own analysis. In my previous work with this data, in my Honours Project in 2017, I integrated the research team and signed a confidentiality agreement.

### **Thematic Analysis**

The objective of the interviews was to ask the PLAY staff about their personal thoughts, especially on the strengths and challenges of the program. These conversations provided valuable data on issues regarding Indigenous knowledge, traditions, and the importance of culture for the youth. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Computer-assisted

qualitative data analysis software, NVivo was used to synthesize and identify patterns and themes within the data. This process is referred to as thematic analysis, a method of analysis in interpreting qualitative textual data from interviews (Jugder, 2016).

According to Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), thematic analysis involves a “rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible” (p. 5). This method of analysis goes beyond counting words or phrases to interpret data; it includes identifying and explaining the implicit and explicit ideas within the data, called “themes.” A thematic, analytical approach allows researchers to grasp the complex meanings in a textual data set. This approach also allows people to interpret the data gathered to acquire thematic codes regardless of the size of dataset; at the same time, thematic analysis is useful in interpreting qualitative data with fewer participants. A thematic analysis is a six-phase process that involves familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming, and the write-up phase (Braun et al., 2016). The first phase is familiarization, described by Braun et al. (2016) as the process of becoming deeply immersed and familiar with the data; in this research, this was done by listening to the recordings and reading through the transcripts more than once. The second phase is “coding the data,” a process that involves thoroughly reading the data and “tagging” pertinent passages or content in the transcripts (Braun et al., 2016). To fulfill this step, the transcript data were coded by highlighting key passages. Steps three and four are the phases of theme development and refinement, which require the organization of codes into themes and verification with reference to the original data to ensure the accuracy of theme interpretation (Braun et al., 2016). The final phase consists of theme naming, which involves naming the themes and subthemes (if applicable) found in the transcripts (Braun et al., 2016).

Based on Indigenous resurgence through a settler-colonial lens, the data analysis portion identified themes pertaining to the importance of creating a space to allow Indigenous knowledge to exist on its own within PLAY. By coding and analyzing secondary data in the NVivo software, I attempted to identify themes related to the importance of Indigenous leadership by looking at the changes and contributions that an Indigenous woman as leader had in the PLAY program during her time as Deputy Director.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis followed Braun et.al's 6 phase process: (1) familiarization, (2) coding, (3) theme development, (4) theme refinement, (5) theme naming, and (6) write-up. In the following subsections I will explain and outline each of my 6 phases of thematic analysis. The first phase of thematic analysis is a process of becoming deeply immersed and familiar with the data (Braun et.al, 2016). To achieve this, I listened to audio files of the interviews and read through the interview transcripts many times through the years (including my honours project). Listening to the participant's tone of voice allowed me to better understand their discourses. The second coding phase is a thorough process which involves reading the data and "tagging" pertinent passages or content in the transcripts (Braun et.al, 2016). During this phase, and again through the years, and while learning more and more about the PLAY, I identified codes in each transcript and marked them as "tags" in the margins of each transcript. This led me to the third development phase, where I organized the identified codes into main themes. This is when I met with the PI in order to develop and refine the themes. Together, we reached the fourth theme refinement that slowly designed the structure of the articles and highlighted the main themes that would be presented in the thesis and writing up phase.

## **Chapter 2:**

### **Sport for Indigenous Resurgence: Toward a Critical Settler-Colonial Reflection**

#### **Introduction**

Working with and for Indigenous peoples of Canada or any other population dispossessed by foreign settlers is destabilizing and involves a continuous self-critical struggle. In her book *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Regan (2010) conveyed an important message for Canadians to support “true” reconciliation: They should engage in their own process of decolonization by interrogating their position as colonizers and by acknowledging their complicity in perpetuating the colonial status quo through what she calls the “benevolent peacemaker myth.” Beyond words of apology, politics of recognition (Hallenbeck et al., 2016), and programs to help fix “the Indian problem,” Indigenous scholars have called for transformative decolonization that starts with confronting a “colonial mentality, moral indifference, and historical ignorance” (Alfred, 2010, p.x) in order to foster Indigenous resurgence (Simpson, 2011; Alfred, 2009).

This work revisits the resurgence hopes stirred by sport and recreation-based programs for Indigenous youth to advance positive social change, youth well-being, and community engagement (Coakley, 2011). Since 2003, when the United Nations institutionalized sport within the rhetoric of “international development” (Black, 2010; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011) as a means to promote health, education, development, and peace, the so-called Sport for development (SFD) and peace sector has expanded (Kidd, 2008); concurrently, related critical research has burgeoned (Darnell, 2014). Sport-based initiatives are also aimed at populations considered “at risk” within the global North, as witnessed among Canadian Indigenous populations (Hayhurst & Giles, 2013; Kope & Arellano, 2016).

Within the expanding SFD sector, as well as in the maturation of a field encouraging more opportunities for reflexivity (Darnell et al., 2016), Giulianotti (2011) specifically called for more research among SFD officials because, “as reflective social actors, they are able to adapt, modify, and transform their practices and strategies in response to changing circumstances or outside criticisms” (p. 52). A series of interviews conducted with the Right To Play (RTP) organization’s Promoting Life-skills for Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) program staff, based on challenges encountered within their practice, demonstrated high levels of constructive self-criticism and reflexivity. Using the practitioners’ words, and according to their personal perceptions, this paper contains a discussion of obstacles to good practice when working with Indigenous peoples. The observations and perceptions of several SFD practitioners working for the PLAY program are examined from the perspective of Indigenous resurgence (Hallenbeck et al., 2016) and decolonization processes (Tuck & Yang, 2012), highlighting key areas raised within a transformative decolonization agenda. Their reflections around the PLAY program—which serves over 85 Indigenous communities in four different Canadian provinces—suggest that several reservations exist regarding the notion that practitioners’ reflexivity has much impact in improving SFD programs and encouraging resurgence within Indigenous communities. By engaging with critical issues within SFD with Indigenous peoples, this paper also underscores the importance of employing a settler-colonial framework for the study of sport and recreation-based programming with Indigenous youth.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Sport for Development (SFD)**

A review of the literature surrounding the SFD platform is enough to illustrate the magnitude of this “loose amalgam of [an] organization of stakeholders who now work to

mobilize sport and physical activity in pursuit of a variety of development goals and conflict resolution” (Darnell, 2014, p. 2). There is an exhaustive critical literature on the challenges facing SFD programs that is multifaceted and based on various theoretical frameworks that range, for example, from Foucauldian discourse analysis (Darnell, 2010b; Nicholls et al., 2011) to critical race theory (Darnell, 2007), decolonization (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011), postcolonial feminism (Hayhurst et al., 2011; Hayhurst, 2014), and critical pedagogy (Spaaij & Jeanes, 2013). In an assessment of this critical literature, Darnell (2014) identified four categories of ethical, social, and political challenges facing SFD programs: the terms of development, the issue of agency, social reproduction, and privilege and dominance.

First, building on the work of Black (2010), Darnell (2014) underlined three sets of issues that SFD programs have to face with regards to the terms of development: “The tensions between ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ strategies, the specific political orientation of any development initiative, and the pluralist definition of development itself” (p. 3). He argued that, while sport is often considered a universal language, in reality, what is conceived as sustainable development is far from being politically neutral. Hartmann and Kwauk (2011) observed the complexity and diversity of meanings attributed to development, which can stem from philosophical concepts, such as the idea of progress of humankind, or practical ideas, such as the “social engineering of emerging nations” (p. 286); or, it can also be attributed to personal or collective normative conceptions of growth within a desirable social mobility scale (see Coakley, 2011). Ultimately, the dominant ideological orientation that permeates most SFD programs is neoliberalism, “in which citizens are deemed to be individual agents with responsibilities to pursue and secure their own prosperity” (Darnell, 2014, p. 4; see also Guest 2009).

In this vein, the analysis of sport and recreation programs for Indigenous populations in Canada has much in common with the critical appraisal of the concept of development and related practices that work within a dominant paradigm of modernization posited as “universal” and “integrative” (Darnell, 2007). Paraschak (1995) highlighted how Euro-Canadian sports, such as hockey, soccer, or baseball, are implemented as “natural” and “legitimate” forms of physical activity that have been, in fact, utilized as a privileged tool of assimilation. Showing how the 1876 Indian Act was instrumental in the control of Indigenous peoples, Forsyth (2007) noted how sport opportunities were shaped through constantly renewed colonial and oppressive interpretations from policymakers (2007, p. 96). Similarly, Giulianotti (2004) observed how imperial games were “utilized particularly by Christian missionaries and other imperial pedagogues to crush Indigenous cultural identities and practices” (p. 358).

Darnell’s second category of challenges concerns local agency, which is also often equated with processes of decolonization (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011). Recognizing, along with Coalter (2013), that more recent SFD programs and initiatives are increasingly replacing previous top-down approaches with more collaborative, bottom-up, and locally sustainable initiatives, Nicholls et al. argued that, even today, local voices are being silenced due in part to a lack of genuine co-creation of knowledge in a competitive world where donors set development agendas and priorities that reflect Western convictions (2011). In other words, SFD is, more than ever, driven by corporate wants, where partnership-led structures convey unequal power relations dominated by donors, sponsors, and policymakers (Nicholls et al. 2011). Also, an increasingly complex landscape with multiple competing stakeholders encourages what Giulianotti described as “intersubjective and practical flaws” between practitioners and Indigenous communities where “project workers may have weak understanding of local

conditions or poor engagements with client groups and other nonsport development initiatives” (2011, p. 51). In the same vein, Hayhurst and Giles (2013) suggested that the Canadian government’s “domestic transfer objective” of SFD programs to Indigenous communities shows “increasing power and presence of nonstate actors such as transnational corporations (TNCs) and international NGOs” (p. 505). However, for these authors, this “potential shift in the sport/international development aid nexus” (506), mainly influenced by the incipient demise of the welfare system and concurrent reinforcement of neoliberalism, may be creating new opportunities favoring Indigenous self-determination. For these authors, self-determination is understood as self-governance, grounded in Indigenous reciprocity values and collective responsibilities (Hayhurst & Giles, 2013).

The third category of challenges involves the issue of social reproduction. Drawing from the work of Coalter (2010) and Kaufman and Kwauk (2010), Darnell (2014) argued that most SFD programs are not “designed to bring about social changes to inequalities, but rather to resocialize and recalibrate individual youth and young people into the structures of privilege and dominance by which such inequalities are maintained” (p. 9). Based on a neoliberal system and related values, such programs are said to focus more on the character development and personal achievement logic of a hypercompetitive world, and they are “discounting social issues and the need for progressive change at a collective or community level” (Coakley, 2011, p. 308; see also Darnell, 2010b; Kay, 2009; Hayhurst, Giles, & Wright, 2016). Coakley (2011) proposed his own classification for the uncritical evangelical goodness of sport claims: personal character development, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as improved body image; reforming “at-risk” populations by teaching self-control and obedience to authority (the “car-wash effect”); and fostering individuals’ social capital, encouraging civic engagement and the

use of social networks, and inspiring educational achievement. The lack of satisfactory empirical evidence on SFD claims is said to reinforce and serve neoliberalism, a dominant vision “in which sport essentially reproduces established social relations” (Harman & Kwauk, 2011, p. 284; see also Kay, 2009; Coakley, 2010). The point here is not to reveal a conspiracy at work, argued Darnell (2014), but rather to suggest that the context in which SPD operates favors the reproduction of existing power relations.

Decolonization, from this perspective, would therefore seek to disrupt existing notions of power, fight for self-determination, and support local empowerment. Kope and Arellano (2016) used a reflection upon the critical youth empowerment model (Jennings et al., 2006) to analyze a Right to Play life skills development program for Canadian Indigenous youth. While empowerment can be framed through critical thinking and the understanding of sociopolitical processes (Freire, 1970), Kope and Arellano (2016) insisted on following Indigenous scholars’ calls for resurgence—a cultural and spiritual re-grounding that can begin by re-appropriating and re-enacting Indigenous languages, ways, systems of governance, and general worldviews that are supported by the connection to, and use of, the land (Simpson, 2011).

The local empowerment trend also consists of avoiding and impeding the obstacles connected to a fourth category of challenges relating to privilege and dominance, which concerns practitioners working for SPD programs, who largely originate from privileged backgrounds. Darnell (2014) argued that, “without a vigilant critical analysis of race, sport-for-development practice can reinforce Whiteness as a dominant subject position based on stewardship and benevolence” (p. 11.; see also Darnell, 2007). However, the substantial expansion of the SFD sector during recent decades has brought about more knowledgeable and self-reflective officials who may transform and help decolonize the SFD field (Giulianotti, 2011).

While critics have condemned attempts to challenge and renew traditional development practices with sport, others have pursued a path toward re-imagining SFD within the decolonizing narrative. Focusing on feminist participatory research methodology would reinforce alternative knowledges and local agency (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011) while highlighting internal opportunities for participants to resist and revert negative Indigenous stereotypes (Hayhurst & Giles, 2015). From that perspective, decolonization research within the SFD sector supports self-determination while engaging in the politics of resistance to oppression and hegemonic forces by scrutinizing individual agency, forms of local knowledge and culture, self-determination, and empowerment issues (Kope & Arellano, 2016; Guest, 2009; Nicholls et al., 2011). The next section examines how a postcolonial Indigenous framework and theory frame the decolonization praxis, as well as how this can guide the understanding of SFD research and decolonization.

### **Settler-colonial Framework and Resurgence**

For several Indigenous scholars, settler-colonialism is the Indigenous postcolonial framework that should be applied to any research with Indigenous peoples (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Hallenbeck et al., 2016). Settler-colonialism distinguishes itself from postcolonial theory in that it frames power relations and land disputes as central in settler versus Indigenous sovereignty. The very foundation of settler-colonialism is based on issues of land or territory. In other words, “territoriality is settler-colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 385). Yellowknife Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard (Hallenbeck et al., 2016) drew on Fanon’s work to build and provide more rigour to a growing Indigenous resurgence theory grounded in settler-colonialism, which is, for him, “a relatively diffuse set of governing relations that operate through a circumscribed mode of recognition that structurally ensures continued access to Indigenous people’s land and resources by producing neocolonial subjectivities that co-opt

Indigenous people into becoming instruments of their own dispossession” (p. 156). Based on Fanon’s critical reading of Hegel’s theory of recognition, Coulthard deconstructed the Canadian politics of recognition, emphasizing the production of “psycho-affective attachments,” such as the 2008 federal apology for residential schools, or the recognition of certain “aboriginal” rights, which are internalized as expressions of Indigenous self-empowerment and self-determination, but which ultimately “naturalize” settler-colonial hierarchies and colonial structures.

Aboriginality, the settler-imposed ‘legal’ identity, is therefore seen as engrained in the colonial legal apparatus where predatory capitalism and its systems of extraction (Klein, 2013) play a central role in dispossessing Indigenous peoples of their land, resources, and sovereignty (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005).

The land issue is key, and approach other than this one, or theoretical framework dealing with Indigenous issues would misguide the very core of Indigenous claims. In other words, centering decolonization within the rhetoric of social justice, anti-racism, self-governance, or resistance to oppression are subsumed within a Western and neoliberal rights-based system that has little impact for the core cause.

Decolonization is not converting Indigenous politics to a Western doctrine of liberation; it is not a philanthropic process of helping the “at-risk” and alleviating suffering; it is not a generic term for struggle against oppressive conditions and outcomes. The broad umbrella of social justice may have room underneath for all of these efforts. By contrast, decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 21)

For these authors, the Canadian nation and all its citizens’ privileges were founded upon, and are maintained through, ongoing dispossession through shape-shifting forms of colonial

power (Alfred, 2009; Tuck & Tang, 2012; Simpson, 2016). Reconciliation would therefore mean showing commitment to a better-shared land:

There are very few places left where we can be Nishnaabeg on our own terms. The federal and provincial governments, after years of court battles, have finally recognized hunting and fishing rights for the Williams Treaty communities. This is a tremendous victory for us, as we have very few places we can hunt. Giving these places back is an excellent start to an ongoing process of reconciliation that is more than just apologies and superficial changes. Land is an important conversation for Indigenous peoples and Canada to have because land is at the root of our conflicts. Far from asking settler Canadians to pack up and leave, it is critical that we think about how we can better share land. (Simpson, 2016)

In parallel with contesting land dispossession, emerging Indigenous political thought is calling for processes of active decolonization, with critical individual and collective “self-recognition” on the part of Indigenous societies, in order to renew and re-engage with Indigenous cultural forms, principles of reciprocity, and respectful coexistence between humans and the land. According to Leanne Simpson, a Nishnaabeg activist and scholar, this *decolonial praxis*, or “nation-culture-resurgence,” refers to:

reinvesting in our own ways of being; regenerating our intellectual and political traditions; articulating and living our legal traditions; language learning; creating and using our artistic and performance-based traditions. All of this requires us to reclaim the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated. (Simpson, 2011, p. 17–18)

Such advocates of Indigenous resurgence have called for “self-conscious traditionalism,” a movement of cultural revitalization, political emancipation, and sovereignty in which Indigenous people and groups should emerge “from within” (Alfred, 2009). This process “from within” does not imply “separate from”; rather, the aim is to renew relations with non-Indigenous, national, and international organizations, as well as networks of solidarity that are committed to taking shared responsibility for Indigenous resurgence and well-being as defined by the people themselves.

From a non-Indigenous perspective, Regan (2010) claimed that decolonization is about the settlers’ own reflexivity and willingness to interrogate their own positions as perpetrators and colonizers and about reconsidering the “good intentions” to fix “the Indian problem” by re-centering the colonial status quo as “the settler problem.” Mirroring the Indigenous resurgence movement, Regan offered a pedagogical strategy for decolonization in truth-telling and reconciliation processes. The “turn to reconciliation” (Simpson, 2011), or the global era of apology (Alfred, as cited in Regan, 2010), engages Canadians in confronting the truth about their dark history and the living legacy of colonialism. The institutionalization of reconciliation, though, has to go beyond simple statements of recognition of and regrets for “past” experiences:

If reconciliation is focused only on residential schools rather than the broader set of relationships that generated policies, legislations, and practices aimed at assimilation and political genocide, then there is a risk that “reconciliation will level the playing field” in the eyes of Canadians. (Simpson, 2011, p. 22)

Formal apologies should not equal absolution: Rather, they should be grounded in Indigenous resurgence. From the perspective of “unsettling the settler,” and drawing on Jefferess’ work (2008), Regan (2010) reminded us that reconciliation efforts have to help transcend thinking that

keeps non-Indigenous Canadians “trapped in the roles of colonizers, [and] resistance must be understood not only as subversive or oppositional . . . but as transformational in its ability to alter world views, structures, and cultures of power” (p. 215). As she explained, Canadians should transcend the myth of benevolence and peacemaking, or benevolent colonialism, by unraveling

the Canadian historical narrative and deconstruct the foundational myth of the benevolent peacemaker—the bedrock of settler identity—to understand how colonial forms of denial, guilt, and empathy act as barriers to transformative sociopolitical change. To my mind, Canadians are still on a misguided, obsessive, and mythical quest to assuage colonizer guilt by solving the Indian problem. (Regan, 2010, p. 11)

To serve resurgence, organizations working with and for Indigenous populations should demonstrate a readiness to engage in a dialogue that will be difficult and uncomfortable while assuming and recognizing the settlers’ “feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 10).

### **Research Context and Protocol**

This study analyzes secondary data collected from the research program “Building Meaningful Sport Programs for Indigenous Youth” (2012-2014). Secondary data analysis involves “the re-analysis of either qualitative or quantitative data already collected in a previous study, by a different researcher normally wishing to address a new research question” (Payne & Payne, 2004, p. 214). The re-analysis of secondary data allows the researcher to answer new research questions and brings new perspectives to the existing data, which may produce important new research findings (Ritchie et al., 2013). Interviews for the study were conducted in 2014 among 10 staff members ( $n = 8$  females, 2 males) holding varying positions. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to ask open ended questions and receive

“in-depth information that helps us to understand the unique as well as shared circumstances in which they live, and meanings attributed to their experiences” (Piercy, 2004, p. 1). Each semi-structured interview lasted between 20 and 180 minutes and was largely based on the participants’ views of how the program has evolved and adapted over time, as well as its current perceived successes and challenges. Interviews were transcribed and analyzed using a thematic analysis, which follows Braun et.al’s six-phase process of familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming and write-up (Braun et al., 2016). This study looks at some of the reflective discourses of PLAY staff members and highlights several perceived challenges within the program. To provide participant anonymity, pseudonyms were used. This paper focuses on some key challenges and self-reflective discourses that emerged from the analysis. Several self-critical challenges were themed within a discussion analyzing issues of 1) growth and pace, 2) Indigenous agency and knowledge, and 3) political engagement. It is important to note that although the period of this study has certainly influenced PLAY until today, it does not reflect most recent changes that may have occurred after 2014.

### **Promoting the Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) Program**

The 2010 Canadian Vancouver Olympics legacy opened up new opportunities for the international SFD organization Right to Play, which until that point had only operated in countries at the lowest levels of the Human Development Index. Simultaneously, the event’s hosting brought Ontario’s Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs to commission Right To Play to design and implement the pilot version of a sport-based program for Indigenous youth in two Far North First Nations communities of Ontario. What became the PLAY program has since gone through a series of dynamic iterations and experienced extensive growth, creating a multifaceted program that, in the first year alone, expanded to a total of 34 communities, compressing a four-year

program commitment into a one-year renewable program. The program also spread geographically, in 2017, to over 85 First Nations communities, mostly in Ontario, but also in Manitoba, British Columbia, and Alberta in partnership with the PLAY program that now annually reaches over 5,000 Indigenous children and youth in Canada.

PLAY uses the transformative power of sport and play to educate and empower “Aboriginal” children to become leaders and active participants in their communities (PLAY, 2015). Each participating community goes through a yearly application process to partner with Right To Play through a selection in which the participant communities commit to hiring a local community mentor to be trained by Right To Play. The community commits to paying at least half of the mentor’s salary, providing a safe space for the program, hosting occasional PLAY team members visits, and generally supporting the mentor with adequate resources.

While the program has evolved throughout the years, the 2018 program version offered core programs (Youth Leadership, After School, PLAY for Diabetes Prevention, and SFD programs based on soccer, hockey, baseball, and lacrosse) in combination with complementary programs (e.g., sport clinics, summer school, or female empowerment workshops). In addition to choosing their program components, all participant communities were invited and funded to take part in several Right To Play-organized special events and gatherings with strong capacity-building and training features (e.g., the biannual community mentor training week, the annual youth symposium, as well as several other more sporadic training and sport certification clinics). While the Youth Leadership Program core program was central from 2011 until 2014, currently, each community program customizes core and complementary components based on localized needs and interests.

The PLAY program has shown impressive, rapid growth and community reach by multiplying opportunities and building relationships with the communities (Arellano et.al, 2018). Community reception and perceptions of the program are generally positive (Feathers of Hope, 2014). The program's malleability and flexibility explain how it became a community-led and owned initiative (Arellano et.al, 2018; Kope & Arellano, 2016). Each local program also reflects the values of youth empowerment. Through the program, mentors encourage youth to work together in guiding activities by constantly articulating and asserting their voices—not only in the everyday practices of the program but also through specific built-in activities encouraging youth to stage events in their communities. The play staff perceived capacity-building activities, as well as the focus on strengthening mentor skills, competencies, and abilities to lead youth recreation programming, as major positive outcomes of the program (Arellano et.al, 2018). The week-long training programs and community representative gatherings, such as the youth symposium and mentor training, have also become meaningful in terms of consolidating durable intercommunity connections and ties. Over the years, a substantial PLAY network of friendships supporting and fostering youth well-being has been created across Ontario and other participating provinces (Arellano et.al, 2018).

## **Results**

### **Growth and Pace: On Partnerships and Performance-Based Programming**

The rapid growth of the PLAY program, which expanded from four communities to 34 after its pilot year, is key to understanding the competitive structure of the SFD sector. Currently, the program is multifaceted and constantly evolving via new partners, funding opportunities, community input, changes in PLAY leadership, and high staff turnover in general. Three types of partners work within the structure of the PLAY program: the First Nations partners that request

Right To Play programs; funding partners such as government ministries, corporations, and philanthropic foundations or individuals; and implementation partners from a large variety of organizations, community groups, and institutions (Porter, 2013). For example, in winter 2016, the PLAY program partnered with over 85 First Nations partners and urban Indigenous organizations, as well as 53 funding partners and 18 implementing partners. The rapid expansion and diversity of new partners brought coordination and management challenges. Donor-funded programs such as PLAY work in partnership with myriad entities endorsing different and often contradictory objectives, as well as contrasting operational priorities (Beacom & Read, 2011). As one employee put it: “You’re pulled in all directions because we’ve got stakeholders with various different interests . . . with their own reason for being there and their own objectives for what they think the PLAY is all about” (Finley).

Funding partners are crucial for the survival of most programs, but for some of the interviewees, these new partnerships, at the center of the 2011 growth, transformed the original four-year program into a considerably shorter one that focuses more on performance criteria and competes for external funding.

The following comment illustrates how the growth logic reproduces the status quo of the most disadvantaged communities.

I’m worried that we’re going to do more damage or that it’s not going to be helpful when we’re moving toward the [program] application process, and it’s becoming more and more competitive as we expand if you take, for instance, in regard to the competitiveness the way things are structured. If you show, as a community, that the support is there, if you show that you’re willing to contribute money, if you show that you’re more likely to do things like they want, really show that you have the capacity to

host the program, then you're more likely to get funding—to get it—as opposed to a community that has nothing and doesn't have the capacity. They are the ones that would really need the program. (Alexis)

Solutions to such issues are usually addressed by the organization after listening to staff debriefings. In this instance, a special program was put in place to help the neediest communities have a chance to partner with the PLAY program. The program design, management, and implementation are all very efficient, as demonstrated by the constant growth and communities' demand for partnership. Despite the ongoing positive reception and stories emanating from the program, some staff members suggested that the principles guiding the design and main changes to the PLAY program relate to internal, organizational, and financial sustainability more often than to meaningful, sustainable, community-owned programs aimed at helping participants regain their Indigenous identities. The next section covers these issues further. The pace of growth, pressure for results from funders and senior administrators, and the complexity of the multifaceted relationships with diverse partners are often perceived as obstacles to meaningful programming and accountability to the communities. As a staff member recalled, “We say that we feed it all back to the community, but it's actually for the funder. . . . So, the drivers are numbers, funders, funding, brand, glory, and the media; the drivers are not community based or reciprocity” (Jordan). This logic and pressure to produce quantifiable results is seen as a diversion from efforts to create meaningful experiences for participating communities.

I can see that there are many needs within communities, and we have many communities who approach us and want to have programs, you know, which speaks positively to why we might expand. But we need to be true to ourselves as well as to those we're working with in responding to what it is that we can actually do, what our

capacity is, and not just saying yes so that we can increase numbers but making sure that it will actually be a meaningful experience for the participants. . . . To me, it wasn't about let's do more but let's think about what we're doing and why we're doing it so that you're not rushing in. (Riley)

In this respect, some respondents felt internal pressure from what is described as a “hierarchical” organization’s senior leadership, seen as the main program-expansion proponent. This seems a realistic concern, particularly now that the program has somewhat recently been integrated into Right To Play International (2014), which makes it more susceptible to centralization and standardization.

I think that the real driving force behind the growth in terms of reach really comes from senior leadership. And it's just that idea about sport for development being this like universal solve-all and this vastly driven vision of just push through, and I think that's really where it's coming from. And especially now that our program is no longer a pilot project but officially part of the Right To Play programs as a whole, and there's a lot more watchful eyes on our program . . . it truly feels one directional and hierarchical. (Alexis)

The issues raised in relation to growth and expansion through the partnership-led structure and the quest for multiple sources of funding reflect how program operations align with the “global civil society marketplace, wherein NGOs compete to win contracts to carry out development work” (Giulianotti, 2011, p. 54). The hierarchal leadership and senior management’s drive for quantifiable results is seen as incompatible with accountability to the communities, co-created knowledge, and Indigenous ways (Nicholls et al., 2011), particularly in a sector where transnational corporations are increasingly present and powerful (Hayhurst &

Giles, 2013) and maintain their own agendas. Right To Play's structure affects the pace of the organization, which was described by all the respondents as sustaining a "high energy and stress level" (Finley). One respondent saw this as the main challenge of the program.

I think, obviously, the capacity to deliver more always, and that there's always a lot of excitement about new ideas, and sometimes there's not always the capacity to deliver a million new ideas. And so, people are stretched to their maximum, and that a lot of the ways that the program has run because the group is who they are and as dedicated, and the community mentors are equally willing to go way above and beyond. Maybe that's not the most sustainable, going so above and beyond all the time. (Riley)

Fast-paced growth also drives a culture of competitiveness that is often seen as incompatible with Indigenous ways. The following observation raises an interesting question: "The communities are generally happy with the program, but there is this overwhelming sensation that community members think these resources should be given to Indigenous organizations in the first place" (Jordan). This conversation raises questions around the logic of a corporate Indigenous youth-centered program that now serves 85 communities and has been managed for six years mostly by non-Indigenous people. Increasingly, grassroots Indigenous programs and organizations have proven highly successful and culturally appropriate, yet they struggle with short-term funding and a general lack of resources (see Alfred, 2014; Gaudet, 2014; Simpson & Coulthard, 2014). Part of the answer to why not fund Indigenous organizations and youth programming models may be found in the aforementioned competitive political economy of SFD, in which the new international legitimacy of sport, with its utilitarian contribution to human rights and millennium goal objectives, is embedded in the increased competition for funding (Beutler, 2008; Coalter, 2010), a race for financial survival, growth, and

performance that requires capacities that are extremely scarce within Indigenous organizations. Another answer could be found in unconscious, internalized, and institutional discrimination practices (Darnell, 2007) combined with the “social problems industry” (Pitter & Andrew, 1997; Hartmann & Kwauk, 2011) that targets “at-risk” youth in need of recalibration (Darnell, 2014). For Simpson and Coulthard (2014), land-based models of education and knowledge transmission remain undervalued as legitimate and sustainable forms of programming among Western, white institutional bodies. Discussing how Indigenous resurgence should be in sharp contrast with capitalism, Simpson (2008) advocated confronting this “funding mentality,” because it has been proven to serve the colonial status quo: “Re-centering our work means foregoing the funding . . . in favor of building relationship[s] with our territory and the Keepers of our Knowledge, things we can largely do without the support of capitalism” (p. 78). Between the need for more resources for Indigenous organizations or initiatives and the competitive environment and related organizational culture lies the need for dialogue, as well as the openness needed to respect Indigenous knowledge systems and the capabilities of the Indigenous peoples themselves—both vital elements in Indigenous resurgence.

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Agency**

The Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group (2008) stated that SFD programs “seek to empower participants and communities by engaging them in the design and delivery of activities, building local capacity, adhering to generally accepted principles of transparency and accountability, and pursuing sustainability through collaboration, partnerships, and coordinated action” (p. 3). From this perspective, sport is seen as a privileged development tool that should favor Indigenous agency. Beacom and Read (2011) demonstrated how Right To Play went through an important shift in 2003 in order to align with these post-development

trends and to maintain organizational infrastructure to increase operations and support the demand for their programs. The main strategic change was decentralization, shifting from the previous international volunteer model to a new local staffing model that encouraged and valued local expertise while enhancing the local capacity “to plan, implement, manage, monitor, and evaluate the program” (p. 342). This development, in turn, represents an important change in participation and agency in which communities and local actors potentially have decision-making capacity and a stronger voice in co-designing and “owning” their programs.

The PLAY program reflects this policy since each community hires a local community mentor in charge of the program delivery. While the capacity building and skills acquisition by the 85 community mentors are seen as some of the important strengths of the program, some participants suggested that mentors experience too much pressure and responsibility: “The program is largely dependent on the success of the community mentor” (Finley); “It’s a lot of pressure on one individual within a community to be the one to create all that change” (Alexis).

Despite this claim to community-led programming, the following statement suggests that communities are not being seriously consulted for the program design: “You can’t design a program without the community around the table. I can’t emphasize that any more than that.” (Jordan). This opinion was often expressed in terms of writing curricula when it came time to update, rewrite, and renew the program for the following year.

Here’s a game from Africa in the PLAY manual. We don’t take the time to come from an Indigenous perspective around sport and play and how Indigenous peoples use it for skill development or anything like that to contextualize it, right? Around skills and knowledge and teamwork and play and everything else. (Jordan)

While soccer, baseball, hockey, and modern lacrosse (Downey, Ducharme, Moran, Semple, & Robertson 2012) are often the basis of PLAY program components, some of the practitioners interviewed were well aware of issues relating to the role of sport in the colonial subjugation of Indigenous peoples by de-historicizing and depoliticizing physical activity (Arellano & Downey, 2018; Forsyth, 2007; Parashack, 1995), as well as how their actual program did not have the capacity to craft programs that were more in line with local interests and knowledge.

Thinking about “diffusionist” views of programs using sport, Robidoux (2012) highlighted how Indigenous communities reappropriate Eurocentric sports and re-enact them with their own worldviews and meanings. These reappropriations are witnessed rather frequently within the context of the PLAY program through a youth-led event module, which often includes cultural restoration dimensions (Kope & Arellano, 2016). However, beyond such displays of cultural practices, some interviewees brought their critical reflections to more structural grounds and envisioned the possibility of doing more and better by being more politically engaged and by building slower, stronger, and more reciprocal relationships for developing holistic and Indigenous knowledge-based programs. Despite all the work to accommodate Indigenous values, needs, and interests, the PLAY program comes across as offering rather superficial programming.

I think the program does a lot to address sort of surface-level issues, but [the communities are] deeply embedded in much more structural, deeper issues that the program doesn't directly address. And so, to create really meaningful, deep, lasting, sustainable, impactful change, I think that takes a great deal of time and a really diverse group of people. So, one example being suicide, which is a huge issue in a lot of the

communities. We don't have staff members who are trained specifically and can assist in that, you know, and especially from a First Nations perspective. So, I think that, although our programs can provide opportunities for children and youth to look forward to things and keep them focused and engaged, I don't think that it necessarily addresses crucial issues of why suicide ideation exists, or, you know, completed suicides and things like that. So, I really think that we need to go deeper. It's not necessarily that we have to be those experts, but we need to be partnering with people who work in all the different capacities so that we're addressing things more holistically. It just can't exist on its own and expect to create all of these big things that people talk about. I mean, if you look at attribution, how can you be sure that this program is contributing to that change? It's much bigger than that. Much deeper. (Alexis)

For these respondents, understanding the crucial local issues, as well as local knowledge, culture, and traditions through a more holistic approach, is something that must be honoured, respected, and valued. Kahnawáke Mohawk scholar Alfred (2014) provided a clear example of how youth programs can be more significant by avoiding these compartmentalized notions of sport and recreation through the example of the Akwesasne Cultural Restoration (ACR) program. The ACR is

a land-based and language-infused cultural apprenticeship program that gives learners the opportunity to apprentice with master knowledge holders to learn traditional, land-based, cultural practices, including hunting, and trapping, medicinal plants and healing, fishing and water use, and horticulture and black ash basket making. (p. 135)

This example shows how a youth program can be community led, politically engaged, and driven by cultural restoration and Indigenous resurgence while contributing to these causes at the same

time. This bottom-up program is grounded in efforts to counter intergenerational and historical trauma due to Indian Residential Schools, colonial redress, and environmental contamination in the area. This particular program came from a slow development process that combined Indigenous researchers, local consultation, and community consensus (Alfred, 2014). As we have seen, Indigenous resurgence in the “age of apology” (Lightfoot, 2015) calls for political and cultural re-grounding processes that should be encouraged and enabled by such programs (Simpson, 2011).

Gaudet (2016) showed how Moose Factory, a community that has continued to partner with the PLAY program since the pilot years, developed a youth program in 2009 (like the PLAY program in the early years) in response to the local suicide crisis. A community elder started taking “at-risk” youth to the land to help them reconnect with nature and learn traditional Cree bush culture and skills. This gave birth to Project George, which is now well established by enacting the Cree belief that the connection to the land is the main source of knowledge, food, and well-being. For the community, this program is particularly important, as it was developed by a community elder and is grounded in Cree culture, language, and epistemology. Gaudet also discussed how the PLAY program has been difficult to implement in the community because “the way they do things, it’s not our way.” Moose Cree members from Moose Factory want to reinforce the relationship with their territory and the elder that still holds the Cree knowledge (Gaudet, 2016).

This brings up the question of how a Western organization managed mainly by non-Indigenous people can work without “replacing” traditional knowledge. One respondent reflected on the effect on the whole program’s approach to working with Indigenous communities.

One of the first things that really surprised me when I started with the PLAY program was that the staff are majority non-First Nations themselves. I was expecting that the team would be more reflective of the communities that we work with. And many of them hadn't worked with First Nations before; they actually were learning through the jobs that they were currently doing. And I think that it speaks more to the international side of programs and this idea, again, of the universal logic. (Riley)

The social reproductions of whiteness, privilege, and dominance described by Darnell (2007, 2014) are clearly recognized within the PLAY program demographics:

This idea of privilege that comes with—I shouldn't even just say it's not Indigenous staff, as it's primarily white, Caucasian and, you know, grew up in urban centres, middle-class, upper-middle-class families. So, the demographic is very limited, and I think that people are looking for sameness when they're hiring without even realizing. So, it's just like a drawing for likeness. And I think that oftentimes as well because there's such a focus on producing, they're looking for people who will just jump in and do rather than ask questions or perhaps, you know, change the way that things are done because they just want to continue doing the work that they're doing. And I think that if you had more staff that had experiences within the communities and brought that to their work, it would change the way the work was done. I think also that the organization is so Western in the way it presents itself, as well as the way it does its programming and its current composition, that many staff who either are Indigenous themselves or have a lot of experience with Indigenous initiatives, programs, communities, things like that, might not necessarily want to work there because that's

not an approach that they feel comfortable working with. They'd rather work at a Friendship Center or an Indigenous organization. (Alexis)

This quote also suggests a gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous approaches and worldviews. It also emphasizes the social reproduction of disparities that cannot really be overcome without recognizing the suggested profound sociocultural differences. As noted by this participant, such organizations must engage with decolonizing practices by critically reflecting on how to be respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing and symptoms of colonial relations, as reflected in another statement made by the same respondent.

In this day and age, if you truly have an understanding of what it means to be in meaningful relationship with Indigenous peoples, it is imperative that you have Indigenous leadership at the helm of such [a] program. I just believe so strongly about that. And that at a minimum, have at least Indigenous staff. And it's interesting because I think a non-Indigenous person can run Indigenous programming. I think we see it, but that's because they've been in relationship for years, and they've been welcomed, and they get it, and they understand their privilege. I mean, they don't understand; they owned their privilege. They make efforts to go to community, to speak with the leadership, to give tobacco to the elders, to educate themselves, and they're in that place. So, it's not about race all the time, I don't think. (Jordan)

These comments on the need to welcome more Indigenous people within the organization and privilege the role of different worldviews is key to understanding the political and cultural notion of Indigenous resurgence.

### **Political engagement**

Some of the most critical respondents support the idea that, beyond keeping youth occupied, physically active, and engaged in health promotion through sport and play, fundamental values associated with Indigenous resurgence, such as advocacy, are critical when working with Indigenous peoples and should be at the heart of that relationship.

I think that such NGOs have a much greater role to play. It's okay for the staff to talk about female genital mutilation, land dispossession, child sex trafficking, violence in refugee camps, substance abuse, or anything to do with violence against women when it's over in Africa. But shame on whoever can't handle it here [in Canada] because guess what, this work can be uncomfortable, and we are not here to make people comfortable. We're here to be in relationship with each other for the rights and all of the violations that are happening against Indigenous peoples. And that, I believe, is the ultimate foundational responsibility of any organization in Canada that work with Indigenous peoples. (Jordan)

In other words, any organization or group working with Indigenous populations should accept this political responsibility. Staff members' statements also suggest that SFD programs are limited to the mainstream health promotion and sport participation rhetoric, which is seen as inevitable when the organization operates in a colonial system that funds growth and fosters a white mainstream discourse on progress and social order (Darnell, 2014). The following comment could be related to Coulthard's (2014) thinking, seeing such programs as playing the role of "psycho-affective attachments" while contributing to naturalizing settler-colonial hierarchies and status quo.

We could do so much better. Because we continually operate from that framework, there is nothing that shows we have moved out of the colonial framework. And that is

about the power. It comes from the top down and constantly reproduces white privilege. This whole benefit thing is such a colonial gatekeeping, right, which is so linked to the history of, or to the ideological assumption of Native people being less than because we actually have all the answers. . . . We don't actually understand the systemic and the institutional racism at all. (Jordan)

Political engagement and activism should show a real understanding of the core of Indigenous claims and struggles. This was perceived as a fundamental principle and an obvious challenge in the organization, which may not have the capacity, or even the will, to engage itself in carrying the weight of the Indigenous fight for the land.

The thing that really, really gets to me, that's part of the reconciliation plan, so it's when we host, we should acknowledge the territory we're in, that we bring in and celebrate Indigenous peoples and culture, and we should welcome in that way, right? That's what we should do—recognize there is a huge history. (Jordan)

All practitioners recognized and praised the real efforts made within the PLAY team to educate themselves and to understand the sociohistorical colonial context in which Indigenous communities have evolved (see Arellano & Downey, 2018). However, for some staff members, this program partnership requires a clearer understanding of the reproduction of the colonial status quo, power relations, notions of privilege, but also advocacy and militancy. “To decolonize our operations, I think it takes political will. I think it takes champions. I think it takes leadership. It takes tough leaders. It takes courage” (Jordan). Regan (2010) insisted on white allies' responsibilities to deconstruct their privilege and the relations of power that underlie the myth of benevolence and peacemaking. Instead of remaining “benevolent peacemakers, colonizer perpetrators bearing the false gift of a cheap and meaningless reconciliation” (Regan,

2010, p. 237), critical self-reflection should serve “to question the myth, to name the violence, to face the history” (p. 237).

### **Conclusion**

In light of Indigenous resurgence, this paper brought to light the increased reflectivity among practitioners working in an SFD program for Indigenous youth. In addition to discussing suggested structural problems and the neoliberal system in which the program operates, issues of Indigenous agency and voices within the program were examined, thus identifying areas where the PLAY program could be improved. Hiring more Indigenous staff, respecting Indigenous knowledge and values within the program operations were a few areas pointing ultimately toward embracing the sociopolitical responsibility to serve self-determination and social justice. Some of these practitioners’ scrutiny reflected the beginning of a confrontation with the settler-colonial mentality, whose aim is, according to the resurgence protagonists, to stop thinking about Indigenous peoples as vulnerable, at-risk “obstacles” and “problems” (Alfred, as cited in Regan 2010, p. X) and proceed to a critical self-reflection that interrogates the settlers’ own responsibility and positionality within the reproduction of the colonial status quo, moving beyond denial and guilt and toward systemic social change (Regan, 2010). As I discussed, reconciliation is not simply the governmental and legal institutions’ responsibility but a collective one that requires reflexivity. In Okanagan author Armstrong’s words, “Imagine interpreting for us your own people’s thinking toward us, instead of interpreting for us, our thinking, our lives, our stories” and our games (1990, p. 144).

### **Chapter 3:**

## **The Place of “Culture” in a Sport for Development Program for Indigenous Youth**

### **Introduction**

The Canadian Indigenous population is a young one, where children 14 and under make up 28.0% of the overall population, and youth aged 15 to 24 represent 18.2% (Statistics Canada, 2018). Health reports from Statistics Canada reveal that Indigenous populations have a lower life expectancy than other Canadians, higher poverty rates, as well as increased levels of addiction, family violence, and violent crime victimization (Statistics Canada, 2018), making Indigenous youth the main targets of SFD initiatives in Canada (Gardam et al., 2017).

Although there is evidence of the effectiveness of SFD programs for achieving development goals, such as decreasing levels of poverty among Indigenous communities (Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011) and empowering youth and communities to tackle social issues (Hayhurst et al., 2015), scholars have argued for the need of a decolonizing framework within SFD programs with Indigenous communities, where Indigenous knowledge, culture, and traditions are at the center of programming (Arellano & Downey, 2018). Assessing the SFD platform from a lens grounded in Indigenous studies reveals numerous opportunities to further enhance a co-creation of knowledge, increase self-determination, and support Indigenous culture within programs that seek to become community-led initiatives. This qualitative study discusses secondary data based on semi-structured interviews with the PLAY program staff. This SFD program is managed and implemented by Right To Play and operates in over 85 Indigenous communities and urban organizations across Canada. After defining and discussing SFD in Indigenous communities, this work provides insights from Indigenous studies scholars regarding empowerment, decolonization, and resurgence. It then revisits interviews with PLAY

stakeholders in order to highlight their experiences with the issue of culture and how the program has dealt specifically with concerns about respecting Indigenous knowledge. So first, I look at how the program management dealt with the issue of culture, which wasn't initially central to the program being piloted and second, I look at the related hiring of an Indigenous Deputy Director and the experiences during her two-year mandate. For those two sections of our analysis the question of "indigenizing" such program will be at the heart of the discussions.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Sport for Development and Peace in Indigenous Communities**

While sport has a rather long tradition of being used for social control and education (McIntosh, 1971), the institutionalization and internationalization of SFD is recent and began with programs that operated in marginalized communities in the "less developed" world. Today, these initiatives are largely applied in disadvantaged groups located in middle-high income countries such as Canada (Gardam et al., 2017) with the goal of attaining development and peace objectives (Hayhurst et al., 2015). In Canada, the new sport policy (2012–2022) adopted SFD principles for all communities' well-being, and SFD programs are increasingly being implemented in Indigenous communities that are partnering with organizations such as Right To Play (Arellano, Halsall, Forneris, & Gaudet, 2018). These SFD organizations aim to provide Indigenous youth with the tools and education they need to face the social challenges that stem from a "history of marginalization and social injustice" (Callingham, 2015, p. 13) that resulted in the production of a social hierarchy that oppresses Indigenous people (Axelsson, Kukutai, & Kippen, 2016; Lavallee & Poole, 2010).

Now, SFD initiatives are recognized as contributing to social and development interventions of marginalized and underrepresented groups (Kidd, 2008). While this so-called

SFD movement upholds a pathway of hope that would favor equitable life chances, scholars are concerned with the nature of its presumed “universal values” that are often perceived as reinforcing Western ways and serve the politics of social control (Coalter, 2010; Darnell, 2010; Darnell & Hayhurst, 2011; Hayhurst et al., 2010).

Despite a vast array of critical emphasis on these sport-based intervention programs, scholarship further acknowledges the positive outcomes (Kay, 2009), suggesting that these initiatives can provide the means for locals to empower themselves, enact their own vision of social change and enable locally specific causes. These programs are here seen as a tool to re-imagining decolonized practices or as a very tool of decolonization supporting local incentives for resurgence.

### **Indigenous Knowledge and Resurgence**

One of the main goals of SFD initiatives is to empower communities to increase control over their lives (Black, 2010; Hartmann & Kawauk, 2011). To understand empowerment and its relation to Indigenous knowledge and decolonization from an Indigenous perspective, it is important to first draw on the words of Indigenous scholars themselves. According to Mi’kawi scholar Battiste (2005), empowerment involves the “recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today” (p. 1). She argued that Indigenous ways of knowing have been severely misrepresented and have become invisible due to “knowledge produced from the West constituting a form of imperialism that disregards and erases other types of knowledge” (as cited in Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016, p. 5). Similar to Battiste, Wilson (2004) asserted that the revival of Indigenous knowledge is deeply connected with the process of decolonization. In Tuck and Yang’s (2012) words, decolonization “specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land, knowledge, and life” (p. 21). Similarly, Simpson (2004) advocated the

revitalization of Indigenous knowledge and named the recovery of “Indigenous self-determination” as a “crucial element for the renewal of Indigenous knowledge” (p. 375). Overall, Indigenous scholars have demonstrated how colonial structures reproduce the erasure of indigeneity; a call for decolonization has centered around resurgence, referring to the re-enactment of traditional culture, Indigenous languages, worldviews, values, governance systems, and philosophy (Alfred, 2009; Simpson, 2011).

Decolonization, from this perspective, would therefore seek to disrupt existing notions of power, fight for self-determination, and support local empowerment. However, scholars have argued that, due to the “power tensions” that exist within SFD (Hayhurst & Giles, 2016), programs have unwittingly embraced “shape-shifting” forms of settler-colonialism” (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Arellano & Downey, 2018). These power tensions “sustain material inequalities and Western power, as well as regularly misrepresent, essentialize, and ignore the voices, agency, and identities of local persons” (Hayhurst & Darnell, 2011, p. 185).

These tensions can be largely attributed to the fact that SFD is driven by corporate needs, where partnership-led structures convey unequal power relations dominated by donors, sponsors, and policymakers (Nicholls et al., 2011). Next, practitioners working for SFD programs largely come from privileged and non-Indigenous backgrounds, and because of this, according to Darnell (2014), “without a vigilant critical analysis of race, the sport-for-development practice can reinforce whiteness as a dominant subject position based on stewardship and benevolence” (p. 11). Also, an increasingly complex landscape with multiple stakeholders encourages what Giulianotti described as “intersubjective and practical flaws” between practitioners and Indigenous communities where “project workers may have a weak understanding of local conditions or poor engagements with client groups and other non-sport development initiatives

(2011, p. 51). Hayhurst et al. (2016) acknowledged that SFD programs need to explicitly align themselves with Indigenous cultural teachings. The community members involved do not need to “fit in” or simply be assimilated into the mainstream culture but should instead be empowered to maintain and revive their Indigenous knowledge. Respecting Indigenous knowledge and “living” it means that SFD initiatives need to engage with the “traditions and politics” in partnering communities (Collison & Marchesseault, 2018).

Moreover, the substantial expansion of the SFD sector in recent decades has brought about more knowledgeable and self-reflective officials that may transform and help decolonize the SFD field (Giulianotti, 2011). These practitioners recognized that to achieve decolonization, Indigenous knowledge needs to “flourish” without “ethnocentric” interference (Battiste, 2005) within SFD programming.

From a non-Indigenous postcolonial perspective, Regan (2010) advised that, rather than focusing on the “Indian” problem and the “good intentions” to fix the “Indian problem,” decolonization is more concerned with the settlers’ willingness to interrogate their own positions as perpetrator and colonizers (Regan, 2010). For Indigenous scholars, this effort comes from “mutual understanding,” which can only be fostered through “mutual dialogue” (Wildcat et al., 2014). From this perspective, SFD programs should encourage open and honest dialogue among Indigenous communities, private donors, governments, and other stakeholders working within SFD programming (Gardam et al., 2017) in order to allow knowledge exchange, which could help practitioners support culture within Indigenous programming. This can be achieved when the program is implemented locally and in a way that encourages self-determination (Gardam et al., 2017), which is understood as self-governance grounded in Indigenous reciprocity values and collective responsibility (Hayhurst & Giles, 2013).

### **Indigenizing Organizations**

SFD programs have the capability of influencing social change in a community. Moreover, Hayhurst et al. (2016) noted that SFD initiatives "have the potential to be used in ways that can promote Indigenous peoples' self-determined goals and values" (p. 1). However, Gardam et al. (2017) stated that, for the self-determination goals to be achieved, SFD programs should be well developed and implemented in such a way that they prioritize Indigenous values over Eurocentric ones. Otherwise, such programs only reaffirm colonialism.

Building upon the work of Maaka and Fleras (2009), Fawcett, Walker, and Greene (2015) described these "Indigenization" processes in organizations, in "the context of colonial policymaking frameworks as a fundamental shift from top-down, 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to bottom-up analysis frameworks grounded in Indigenous models of self-determination" (p. 161). The concept of development, according to Pfeifer (1996), refers to a "process of properly ordering the world" (p. 2), so an organization's bottom-up frameworks are often "subordinated to top-down assumptions and practices" (Black, 2017, p. x). In terms of programs designed for Indigenous youth, this is attributed to the fact that Indigenous values and worldviews are "of less interest often because they exist in opposition to the worldview and values of the dominating societies" (Simpson, 2004, p. 374). From that perspective, indigenizing an organization requires the necessary space and mechanisms to allow Indigenous knowledge to co-exist with Western frameworks (Matunga, 2013, p. 31). For Simpson (2004), an Indigenous scholar, creating the necessary space for Indigenous knowledge requires "the recovery of Indigenous intellectual traditions and educational opportunities that are anti-colonial in their political orientation and firmly rooted in traditions of their nation" (p. 381). As such, Indigenous organizations should be

led by Indigenous peoples and should be fundamentally shaped by "Indigenous voices, epistemologies, concerns, and standpoints" (Hayhurst et al., 2016, p. 1). Indigenous leadership.

Research has also revealed the tensions between conventional forms of leadership or management and Indigenous ways of leading (Muller, 1998; Berkes, George, & Preston, 1991; Varley, 2016). The literature points to hierarchical systems of authority that result in competition, individual achievement, inter-personal communication, and linear concepts of time (Muller, 1998). These attributes are in contrast to Indigenous ways that have been portrayed as using more "relational leadership" approaches bound to knowing oneself and to knowing the community norms (Muller, 1998). In analyzing Indigenous women's leadership in the educational system through a three-year project conducted in New Zealand, Australia, and Canada for and with Indigenous women, Fitzgerald (2006) recognized that Indigenous leadership involves a high degree of reciprocity and accountability toward the community. In exploring the challenge of Indigenous leadership within mainstream organizations, Varley (2016), an Indigenous scholar, argued that "mainstream organizations are hiring Indigenous leaders for their skills, knowledge, and for expertise but measure Indigenous leaders by mainstream values, norms, and behaviors" (p. 976). Overall, Varley (2016) revealed that the Indigenous leadership style is less hierarchical in nature, is driven by group consensus, and is focused on self-reflection and acknowledgement of one's relationship to the land. In distinguishing the Indigenous approach from mainstream leadership approaches, she explained that personal introductions (in the context of a meeting) begin with individuals defining their relationship to the land and to indigeneity, and professional ranks are left out to remove their influence (Varley, 2016, p. 984). Next, in the context of innovation program development, she highlighted that modesty is important and that the leader is responsible for distributing credit to the team moreover, using

“we” statements when discussing innovation is crucial, and success is a collective responsibility (Varley, 2016, pp. 984–985).

Overall, Varley (2016) revealed that Indigenous leadership holds a separate value system from mainstream values and called on Canadians who are committed to decolonization to “critically reflect on their own assumptions, habits, and traditions so that they can better understand themselves” (p. 987). She emphasized that self-education and self-reflection, as well as dialogue among Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons working together in organizations, are the keys to co-existence.

While Indigenous knowledge is gained through holistic, subjective measures, such as oral transmission and environmental interaction, leadership in Indigenous communities is based on “characteristics of the land and needs of the people in their traditional territories for many years prior to colonization” (Kenny, 2015, p. 2). Unlike a hierarchical Western leadership style, Indigenous leadership is “paved with land, ancestors, elders, and story concepts that are rarely mentioned in the mainstream leadership literature” (Kenny, 2015, p. 2). Indigenous leadership is not grounded in the exercise of power by one individual over another; instead, it focuses on guidance through an integrative process that seeks to understand humanity from a holistic point of view through different lenses and perceptions. Julien, Wright, and Zinni (2010) mentioned five different characteristics of Indigenous leadership: It focuses on integrating the community with nature; connects rather than divides; supports social order through harmony in relationships among people and fosters spirituality; maintains values and cooperative behavior for the greater good of the whole (e.g., honesty and integrity in relationships); and seeks consensus among all members. Thus, the leadership of Indigenous organizations is more flexible and less hierarchical in nature, with human beings’ spirituality and wellness as the main focus. Unlike mainstream

leadership, Indigenous leadership considers holistic well-being, including physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional well-being (Julien, Wright, & Zinni, 2010).

### **Promoting the Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY) Program**

Right To Play is an international non-profit organization with a mission to “protect, educate, and empower children to rise above adversity using the power of play” (Right To Play, 2018). In Canada, Right To Play designed a program called PLAY as a catalyst for community, child, and youth development. The PLAY program quickly spread geographically from 4 to 34 communities after the first year of pilot programs. Today, the program has reached 85 Indigenous communities and urban Indigenous organizations across many parts of Canada, including Ontario, Manitoba, British Columbia, and Alberta. While the objectives have often been adjusted since the pilot program in 2010–2011, today, the PLAY program partners with local Indigenous communities and urban organizations to train local community mentors to run play-based programs that “promote healthy living, healthy relationships, education, and employability life skills” (PLAY, 2019). The PLAY program works through a selection process in which an Indigenous community applies to partner with Right To Play. Each participating community is required to hire a local community mentor whom Right To Play then trains. The community is also responsible for providing a safe space for the program to take place, hosting PLAY team members during visits, and generally supporting the community mentor with various local resources. At the same time, Right To Play commits to providing program-related training, as well as on-going support and funding, visiting the participating communities, building the capacity for mentors through workshops, and implementing a youth symposium to celebrate the most active and engaged youth from each partner community in the program.

The PLAY program includes four core programs to be implemented in participating communities throughout the school year. These core programs include an after-school program, a youth leadership program, a diabetes prevention program, and an SFD program. In combination with the core programs, additional complementary programs include sport clinics and female empowerment workshops. Other than the local program components, participant communities are invited to and provided funds for several major special events and gatherings that have strong capacity-building and training features (PLAY, 2016).

According to Arellano et al. (2018), the PLAY program has shown impressive growth and community reach by multiplying opportunities and building lasting relationships with the communities. Right To Play has often received very positive feedback from local communities (Feathers of Hope, 2014). The program also allows communities to be flexible in determining their own needs and interests based on the core and complementary programs. This method of flexibility demonstrates how the program claims to be community led throughout its implementation. For this reason, the program has given participating communities agency over what the program should look like for them with the agreement that the four core programs be present throughout its implementation. The week-long training programs and community representative gatherings, such as the youth symposium and mentor training, have also become meaningful in terms of consolidating durable intercommunity connections and ties. Over the years, a substantial PLAY network of friendships supporting and fostering youth well-being has been created across Ontario and other participating provinces (Kope & Arellano, 2016). Currently, the program is multifaceted and constantly evolving via new partners, funding opportunities, community input, changes in PLAY leadership, and high staff turnover in general (Arellano et al., 2018).

### **Context for This Study**

While the PLAY was being piloted in 2010–2012, the main objective of the program was to promote life skills through sports. However, in 2012, the main objective of the program changed as follows: “to build on the strengths of Aboriginal youth and their community while supporting the value of culture and identity”. This change reflects how the organization recognized the importance and centrality of culture for communities and within its operations. This change in itself depicts an important stage in the design of PLAY and reflects a specific experience while being confronted with cultural differences. During the research partnership, it was noted that most of the PLAY middle/upper level staff was non-Indigenous and had very little experience with Indigenous people prior to being hired (Arellano et al., 2018). Right To Play became aware of the importance of culture and Indigenous knowledge for this program, which led to hiring an Indigenous woman as Deputy Director between 2012 and 2014. In the interview analysis, we explore her own perspective regarding the requirements for indigenizing PLAY and creating a space to allow Indigenous knowledge to exist on its own within Indigenous SFD programming. I am interested in her impact within the organization on the program and how this experience transformed and potentially contributed to indigenizing the program.

### **Methods**

This study analyzed secondary data collected from the research program called “Building Meaningful Sport Programs for Indigenous Youth” (2012–2014). Secondary data analysis is a process that involves using previously existing data to answer new research questions (Dunn et al., 2015) while bringing new perspectives to the existing data, which may produce important new research findings (Ritchie et al., 2013).

I analyzed secondary data from 10 semi-structured interviews collected from the middle/upper management of the PLAY program, which included a 2.5 hour interview to the Indigenous Deputy Director after the end of her mandate in 2014. Conducted in 2014, the interviews lasted between 20 and 180 minutes and represent a specific stage in the rapidly changing PLAY program. Therefore, these findings reflect a period of deep internal changes in the program administration. The period of this study has certainly influenced PLAY until today but does not reflect most recent changes that may have occurred after 2014.

In semi-structured interviews, “the researcher asks a series of open-ended questions, with accompanying queries that probe for more detailed and contextual data” (Piercy, 2004, p. 1). The main objective of the initial interviews was to understand the perceptions of PLAY staff about their personal thoughts, especially on the strengths and challenges of the program. One section of the interview guide related to the issue of “culture” in the program, which became the center of the program, as well as how these perceptions could highlight how the organization experienced cultural differences, Indigenization, or questions of Indigenous knowledge. Some questions intended to explore this issue were formulated as follows:

1) “How important do you think culture and local knowledge are for this program? Do you feel there’s an interest from the communities to learn, practice, and engage with local traditions? Could you give examples of this?”

2) “Would you say that the youth are interested in aspects of culture? Explain.”

3) “Did the program change through the new Indigenous leadership?”

These conversations provided valuable data on issues regarding Indigenous knowledge, traditions and the importance of culture for the youth. While the concept of culture was central to the PLAY official discourse and objective, its usage was used in the interviews and came to be

interchangeable with Indigenous knowledge. A definition provided by the final report on the National Enquiry into Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women and Girls (NEMMIWG, 2019) highlights the centrality of culture for Indigenous peoples and shows how the concept of culture has evolved since the 80s: “Now, in addition to cultural artifacts, “culture” includes elements such as ways of life, language, histories or literatures (both oral and written), belief systems, ceremonies, environments, and traditions” (NEMMIWG, 2019, p. 329). Here, culture refers to Indigenous ways, traditions, spirituality, language, practices, and connection to the land that express and enact Indigenous knowledge.

The interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis, a method used in interpreting qualitative textual data from interviews (Jugder, 2016). According to Guest et al. (2012), thematic analysis involves a “rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible” (p. 5). This method of analysis goes beyond counting words or phrases to interpret data; it includes identifying and explaining the implicit and explicit ideas within the data, called “themes.” A thematic, analytical approach allows researchers to grasp the complex meanings in a textual data set. It also allows people to interpret the data gathered to acquire thematic codes regardless of the size of dataset; at the same time, thematic analysis is useful in interpreting qualitative data with fewer participants. A thematic analysis is a six-phase process that involves familiarization, coding, theme development, theme refinement, theme naming, and the write-up phase (Braun et al., 2016). The first phase is familiarization, described by Braun et al. (2016) as the process of becoming deeply immersed and familiar with the data; in this research, this was done by listening to the recordings and reading through the transcripts more than once. The second phase is “coding the data,” a process that involves thoroughly reading the data and “tagging” pertinent passages or content in

the transcripts (Braun et al., 2016). To fulfill this step, the transcript data were coded by highlighting key passages. Steps three and four are the phrases of theme development and refinement, which require the organization of codes into themes and verification with reference to the original data to ensure the accuracy of theme interpretation (Braun et al., 2016). The final phase is theme naming, which involves naming the themes and subthemes (if applicable) found in the transcripts (Braun et al., 2016).

For the purpose of this research, I analyzed interview data from staff members and an Indigenous person who held the job title of Deputy Director for two years. By coding and analyzing this secondary data with the use of NVivo software, the interviews guided us toward two main areas of interest that were coded separately. First, the staff expressed how they experienced the question of culture while developing the program and what guided them to locate a “supporting culture” at the center of the program and as a main objective. Second, the conversation expressed the impact and changes experienced within the organization through a two-year period of Indigenous leadership. In this way, these experiences highlight how Indigenous leadership could have helped indigenizing the program, as well as the potential lessons learned. To better contextualize the issue of culture within the PLAY program, the following section deals with how the youth and communities involved with the PLAY program had an enthusiastic “thirst for culture”, as well as how this thirst for culture changed the core objective of the program.

### **Analysis**

#### **The Youth Are “Thirsty for Culture”**

Based on the interview data, during the transition period between 2012 and 2014, the staff recognized the need to place culture at the center of the program. In most of the interviews,

the PLAY staff expressed how they experienced the fact that “youth are thirsty for culture”. Indigenous youth reported having a strong desire to learn more about their cultural and traditional practices. In most communities, youth expressed an interest in developing stronger connections with their culture and elders, and others expressed a similar level of interest more subtly by responding rather quickly to cultural activities.

When we were asking the youth or the community mentors like what kind of themes do you want to have for special events or for weeks at camp? Like inevitably, culture week came up. That’s what they wanted to do, right? It wasn’t us imposing it. They were saying it. So, we were starting to see that that was really important to them. So, the way we sort of got there was by trying to integrate elders and integrate intergenerational events. And what came out of it was that a lot of those events were ending up being really tied to local tradition and culture. (Adrian)

Rather quickly, the PLAY staff understood how meaningful programs required this cultural component and came to see it as essential for Indigenous youth programming. As explained by one respondent,

research was showing us that, if you look at communities that have really high suicide rates versus communities that have really low suicide rates, the ones with low suicide rates had a whole series of different factors that were present, like self-governance, control over education, connection between elders and youth, youth programming, females, and power. But then, some of the other factors were cultural continuity, where high percentage of people who know the local language or the local dialect. And then, all the subsequent research that came out of those like big studies that had been done across many reserves in B.C. and that had been multi-year studies said that the single

most power factor, or the one that has the biggest positive indicator was language; the communities that had the highest percentage of language retention had the lowest levels of suicide. So, you know, what's a really good way to incorporate language and language acquisition into your program? It's getting elders into the program to teach the program in their local dialect. (Blake)

Even if the program is mostly facilitated in English, elders' presence came to provide several opportunities for the youth to have continued exposure to Indigenous languages. Culture-related activities also proved to be very attractive for youth. One program officer noted that, while most youth found activities involving arts and crafts very boring, the same youth were very enthusiastic about activities connected to traditional teachings or culture in any way. From learning how to make jingle dresses, organizing sweat lodges, participating in outdoor traditional activities, making traditional arts and crafts, storytelling, or staging a pow wow, the youth expressed excitement about culturally meaningful events:

The very first thing they thought of when their community mentor asked them what kind of an event they wanted to see was a pow wow, right off the bat, and they put it together. They hosted it on Friday, and it was a huge success, but it was right from step one; that was what they were looking for as far as their big event. (Adrian)

In addition to these cultural activities, several respondents highlighted the importance of land and land-based activities for Indigenous communities. In one specific case, four communities came together to do a day of outdoor traditional activities that the youth wanted to make it a seasonal event based on cultural and traditional values:

They went ice-fishing, they played lacrosse outside, they went for a hike, and did some teachings up on the top of a hill. They rotated through them throughout the day, and

what they want to do is make it a seasonal event and do activities that are based on the seasons, which are most culturally and traditionally used. All the winter activities happen, and then they're hoping the next one will be in the spring, and the summer, and the fall. So, I think that's cool in that it's based on the land, and it was all about getting back to the land. By doing it throughout the seasons, it's showing all of the different possibilities and ways of getting back to the land. (Andy).

Overall, the staff recognized that, despite the differences that existed within the communities, the youth all expressed a strong desire to participate in traditional activities. With this recognition, the staff decided to place culture at the center of the program, shifting the program objective as follows: "to build on the strengths of Aboriginal youth and their community while supporting the value of culture and identity" (PLAY, 2012).

However, placing culture at the center of the program wasn't without new challenges. As a product of colonialism, some of the communities were more Christian-based and refused to participate in "cultural" activities that were associated with smudging, dance ceremonies, or the more spiritual world. However, by differentiating the "cultural" from the "traditional," organizers found that some of these religious communities became more likely to accept land-based traditions such as hunting, fishing and teaching stories making sense of their traditional practices transmitted orally through generations. Nevertheless, some participants mentioned a certain malaise in dealing with issues that were perceived as being more "cultural."

If they've come from a very religious community . . . I spent time in a community where no cultural practices were allowed. It's a very religious community, and having people come from that context, I think they're eager to learn . . . just to learn whether or not they choose to continue it in their own lives or in their own communities. It's sort of

their own choice, and we always have elders at training, and there's definitely group settings where it's an opportunity for them to engage in it if they choose, and I think just having that opportunity available is encouraging people to explore it. Even if they don't have previous experience with it or haven't been exposed to it as a youth themselves or in their families or in their communities. (Reese)

Interestingly, despite the religious differences and rules in the communities, the youth welcomed culture and were eager to learn more about it:

Some of the community mentors who come from very religious communities start to become very interested in the issue of culture at training, so people, who during the morning smudge at our training, would always take a step back [and] are now in a circle, and they smudge themselves and participate in drum circles or in dance ceremonies that are led by community mentors at training. But just seeing them take that step forward as opposed to taking that step back has been a really cool transformation. (Adrian)

Overall, the PLAY staff was being confronted with the centrality of the issue of culture with its complexities and differences. Each community was unique and had its own set of beliefs and values, what was acceptable in one community was rejected by another, making the integration of culture into the program very challenging for the PLAY staff. Program officers interviewed also expressed that where some communities were rather closed to culture, youth still showed a desire to connect with these practices.

In one community, they're very opposed to any sort of culture or tradition being a part of the program, but the youth and the youth leadership group, when asked what they most wanted to do, they said they wanted to learn how to make jingle dresses, and there

was nobody in the community who knew how to make them, so we had to actually find somebody outside and fly them in to make them. There was backlash in the community, but the youth were thrilled. And then, for the opening ceremonies, the girls came out and demonstrated the new jingle dress dances that they had learned. And since nobody in the community knew how to teach dances, the community mentor looked up the dances online and they all learned them from YouTube. Like, that's how they're doing it. But the kids are asking for it, right? So if we're going to be really true to our vision of this program, which is giving youth a voice and actually listening to it, then the youth have been saying what we want is greater awareness of our culture, and our history, and our traditions, and we're saying, "Okay, how do you guys do that?". (Adrian)

This participant acknowledged that the youth wanted to learn about their culture despite backlash from their community and simultaneously raised an extremely important question: How can the non-Indigenous PLAY staff teach Indigenous culture? What does it mean to support culture? This whole desire for cultural encounters led PLAY to hire an Indigenous woman at the head of the program. In 2012, the new Indigenous Deputy Director reflected upon her role leading the PLAY program in relation to the new "supporting culture" program objective.

Well, supporting culture is very different than implementing culture, right? I actually was very interested about this whole culture thing when I was there. I said, "What do people mean by culture, supporting? What do we mean?" So, we asked the community mentors. Everybody was saying, "They're incorporating culture into their programs, but what does that really mean?" So, we asked the community mentors. Everybody had a very different definition of what that was. But probably the most important teaching that I try to impart with the team before I left was this: The community itself was feeding

back to us as a result of the residential school experience, and you're talking about youth leadership that want us to incorporate culture or whatever that looks like for us at a community level, and they were feeding back to us saying, we don't know our culture. So, that says to me that we have a responsibility to—through our community mentor trainings, through traditional teachers, through elders—to teach as much as we can to support bringing, restoring the culture. And that's really where I was coming from, around the restoration of culture, because if leadership is truly about identity, you can't actually do identity without culture. So, that's where that was coming from, and I thought, "Well, isn't that interesting?" (Deputy Director)

During the years 2012–2014, the PLAY program managers dealt with the program design, objectives, and the desire to build a truly youth/community-led program by designing relevant and respectful ways of achieving it. One respondent hired by the new Indigenous Deputy Director commented on her impressions of the program when she started working at the organization.

I was struck right away by the integration of culture into the program. Despite the challenges that it involved, like, I know that culture and religion can be sometimes challenging because a lot of the communities we work in, maybe they're strongly of Christian faith, and so at least when I started, it was one of the concerns that we didn't want to have culture too strongly represented in the resources because it may go against the religious beliefs of some of the folks, right? And we want to be inclusive of everyone, right? So, I always thought that this group did an incredible job of balancing that, I mean, integrating elders and really allowing them to guide the nature of how that ought to be involved. (Deputy Director).

Supporting culture came to mean creating the right balance between Western play-based modules and the desire for culture, which moved beyond simply integrating culturally relevant activities into the different curricula; it also referred to the ways, leadership styles, and specific knowledge at the heart of program design, management, and implementation. The next section explores the experiences of the staff attempting to provide such a space for Indigenous knowledge by hiring the new Indigenous Deputy Director and the changes and lessons that this change brought.

### **Self-education on Indigenous Communities and Knowledge**

And then, with the new Indigenous Deputy Director coming in, it was like, it felt like the idea of slamming on the brakes when you're going 120 kilometers an hour and everyone flies through the windshield. (Adrian)

This quote from an experienced member of the PLAY staff expresses the dramatic changes that were perceived during the change of leadership in 2012, where the first generalized comment brought up by the respondents refers to slowing down the pace of operations and think about what we are doing, how we are doing it, and how we can make it better. This is how another respondent describes this change:

She made an amazing, incredible impact on the program. Kind of like how I was talking before, with everyone like go, go, go, let's do it, let's do it! She would always be the one to say okay, let's slow down and let's think about this. And then she would just blow open this whole overarching thing that either no one was talking about or no one was thinking about. And it was really cool, even just like to be around her and work with her. I can see that she made a tremendous impact on the program. (Finley)

The cultural knowledge component that this new leadership brought to the program was felt throughout the managing team and was reflected in different aspects: “She does bring that element of spirituality and that identity into the office. Yeah, it just makes it more present” (Taylor). Dealing with the issue of culture and bringing in new leadership would help to somehow indigenize the program. According to most participants, this person helped develop more culturally meaningful programs and provide an Indigenous turn to the PLAY management. She led the program to be even more appropriate, community led, and Indigenous knowledge based. The Indigenous Deputy Director reflected upon her new position as “the” person responsible for making this program culturally appropriate:

When I entered the job, I was very, very aware that this was a non-Indigenous organization that I was going to work for. But I also saw that there was an opportunity, that the only way that we would actually move the work forward was in the spirit of partnership and reconciliation, because it was a non-Indigenous organization. So, that was really clear to me, and I was all over this. . . . That was the role that I was going to be able to play to truly understand what it was that Right To Play did and how we would strengthen a partnership and relationship with Indigenous communities in the spirit of, again, reconciliation because you have to be very careful about the role of non-Indigenous organizations working in Indigenous communities. And I think that there is great value in being able to work together for the betterment of understanding our shared history. So, that’s kind of how I stepped in. (Deputy Director)

While perceiving this organization and program as an opportunity for getting to know each other and a platform for reconciliation, she began emphasizing on the importance of education. For her, non-Indigenous practitioners working with and for Indigenous communities should make the

effort to self-educate about the sociocultural context of the communities. Importantly, she expressed that non-Indigenous practitioners should acknowledge that they come from a non-Indigenous worldview and should make the effort to educate themselves about Indigenous history and culture. Visiting the partner communities, speaking to the elders, and engaging in Indigenous cultural activities (e.g., giving tobacco from the land to the elders) are all ways through which non-Indigenous practitioners would be able to come to know the ways of the communities.

They make effort to go to communities, to speak with the leadership, to give tobacco to the elders, to educate themselves, and they're in that place. So, it's not about race all the time, I don't think. It's just that you have so much work to do around. . . . I'm not from this worldview. What do I need to do to get myself educated? (Deputy Director)

Another way she emphasized the importance of education was by running educational workshops for every new staff member or intern who came to PLAY in order to facilitate an understanding of the cultural context of the communities that they were working with. "I also do cultural sensitivity. . . . I don't know what I want to call it. I don't want to call it cultural sensitivity. I'm just going to call it cultural awareness training with every new person that comes to PLAY" (Deputy Director). One respondent specifically stated that the Deputy Director helped the staff to understand what each community needed from its unique perspective: "I think her value was huge in a few different aspects, by helping our staff better understand the communities, better understand the context of the culture and the context of the communities that we're working with and working in" (Avery). While her hiring in the organization was perceived as providing more meaning and cultural appropriateness to the program, the senior manager

argued that non-Indigenous staff should also be capable of running these cultural awareness workshops for new staff and interns, which adds to the idea of “self” education.

And my ultimate goal was that it shouldn't always be the Indigenous person. But I don't think that they feel that anybody has that capacity yet. So, that is pretty indicative, the fact that they called me to train a couple of months, or last week, or three weeks ago. I think that's interesting because your ultimate goal in the world of reconciliation is that everybody has the capacity to train because, in reconciliation, to truly understand our shared history, the Indigenous people shouldn't be doing all the training all the time.

(Deputy Director)

Staff members also recognized that understanding Indigenous culture and learning how to work with Indigenous communities is a collective responsibility for all people working with and for Indigenous communities.

This is just my perspective, but I think that oftentimes people looked at her as an expert on all things Indigenous just because she is a Cree woman. And I don't think that, you know, that's a fair approach or thing to do. And it's quite discriminatory. So, I mean, that puts a lot of pressure, I would presume, on somebody who was native, to have all the answers and to know what is to be done. And I think that the obligations on the learning goes across everyone who's there. It's why they're there, to work with the communities, right? (Alexis)

This responsibility is rather clear for the PLAY staff. But how do we come to know how to honour this responsibility was the challenge encountered by the Deputy Director. To be able to work together, she insisted that non-Indigenous practitioners have a “responsibility” to educate themselves.

That is the goal, picking up that responsibility and educating yourself. So, I would say to each and every one of them when I was there three weeks ago: "You now have that responsibility, too". I tell them one thing.: "Your life will never be the same". And the reason it won't be the same is because you have an opportunity that hardly any young people in Canada have. And that is that you're going to be in relationship with Indigenous peoples, and your life will never be the same. And you can email me, and tell me, and verify that, I have no problem, I know I'm right. So then, after that, you carry that responsibility. So, what is it then that you're going to do next time you hear a racist comment, and you hear a stereotype about the Indians as drunks, and the Indians, the no-goods, on welfare, why do they want to still live on the land? You know, they need to catch up to the times, and all stoned, and no good, whatever, right?" (Deputy Director)

Understand the history of colonialism and the impact that it had on Indigenous populations today is also crucial. She wanted all the interns and staff to build a relationship with Indigenous communities not only to run the program but also to challenge the negative stereotypes associated with Indigenous peoples by educating the larger civil society about the history of social injustice that Indigenous people face. On one occasion, she assigned one of the interns to run a cultural awareness training session and reflected on this as an important turn for the program.

There was an intern who actually did do one of the workshops around the table in CNO, and I was so proud of her. I just was, like, so proud of her because she was calling all our colleagues on owning their privilege, and I was like, "It's happening! They're

changing! This is incredible!” But that momentum. That’s the ultimate goal. (Deputy Director)

### **Indigenous Leadership: Self-Determination**

According to staff members, having an Indigenous woman in a leadership position between 2012 and 2014 brought Indigenous knowledge to the organization, which allowed the non-Indigenous staff to understand the culture and specific local conditions in the communities they are working with. This constituted an important step towards making the program more culturally meaningful and instilling Indigenous values, such as self-determination and self-care.

For the purpose of this article, Indigenous leadership is used to emphasize a leadership style that is “grounded in the cultural teachings that supports living Aboriginal communities and coalition building for change” (Young, 1990, p. x). Indigenous scholars have recognized that “robust practices of resurgence often (though not always) need to be coordinated and nested within robust, non-violent, contentious relationships of transformative reconciliation with supportive settlers, just as practices of resurgence require the same kind of empowering contestation, coordination, within and among Indigenous communities” (Asch, Borrows, & Tully, p. 4–5). Just as the work of supportive settlers is essential, the presence of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous practitioners can be seen as an opportunity to reconciliation efforts. However, the program should fundamentally be shaped by "Indigenous voices, epistemologies, concerns, and standpoints" (Hayhurst et al, 2016, p. 1). Similarly, the Indigenous Deputy Director highlighted the necessity of “sharing the power” by ensuring that there are Indigenous peoples in leadership positions in organizations working with and for Indigenous communities:

You step out of the way and you put Indigenous people in positions of leadership is how you hand over to communities, you hand over programs. So, you share the power, right?

You make a point of educating yourself about the history. You acknowledge the community. You advocate for policy.” (Deputy Director)

Here, the Indigenous Deputy Director expressed the view that having Indigenous peoples in leadership positions is essential to running Indigenous organizations. As highlighted by Indigenous scholars (Simpson, 2011; Battiste, 2005; Wilson, 2004), Indigenous knowledge holds a separate value system from Western ones. In that sense, placing Indigenous people at the helm of leadership positions is equivalent to allowing communities to make decisions for themselves without ethnocentric interference. As expressed by a respondent, the Indigenous Deputy Director used her personal knowledge and experience as a Saulteaux Cree woman to bring Indigenous values to the organization, and to help the staff understand the communities and what they needed from their own perspective.

Being an Aboriginal woman herself, coming in and saying, “No, this is what I know, these are some things that you guys really need to know, and you can't read this in a book, and you can't be taught this in a training; this needs to come from me.” So, I think we all learned a lot under her leadership. We learned to slow down a little. We learned to take care of ourselves better. We learned to talk to somebody if we needed to. We learned about vicarious trauma. We learned about lateral violence in the community. It's just things that I don't think people really realize were happening, either within ourselves or in the communities. And yeah, she was just . . . she was a really great leader. She was a great manager, and she had just a tremendous amount of knowledge about the communities, and what the communities need, and how we can understand what they need from their perspective. (Andy)

This quote also suggests the idea of self-determination as being fundamental in the overall relationship. Understanding the communities, educating oneself on the history of colonialism, entering in relationship with the communities by visiting, were all actions that would support local knowledge, respect culture and ultimately favour self-determination. “You know, your drivers should be about a principle of how it is that you support a community’s right to self-determination. That should be your drivers” (Deputy Director). In fact, Indigenous knowledge at the center of program management or leadership and understanding and respecting Indigenous culture and ways in program development require education processes, commitment, and all working together by putting partnering Indigenous communities at the center. Working with the new Deputy Director had a real impact in operations, communication and something deep that changed the way to work with the communities.

The research team that followed the PLAY program from 2010-2016 have a lot to say about the way they experienced the change of leadership. The new Deputy Director completely stopped and blocked the research activities to make sure the project was respectful of the communities.

As researchers, the Deputy Director made us organize a 3-day retreat with PLAY and community members, our research team and she made us create an advisory committee made of two Elders, 2 PLAY staff members and 2 external Indigenous academics that would be supervising the research program and protecting the interests of the communities. From then on, the research partnership was not with RTP anymore, but with the communities, she completely transformed the logic of our research focus and accountability onto communities, which made total sense. (Researcher’s field notes, 2014)

This quote also adds to the idea of accountability towards the community, which is at the heart of Indigenous leadership (Fitzgerald, 2006) and also reflects more bottom up frameworks guided by self-determination that should be guiding organizations working with Indigenous communities.

### **Indigenous Leadership and Self-Care**

Another principle that the Indigenous Deputy Director brought to the organization was that she placed an emphasis on self-care for the staff members. To begin with, the Indigenous Deputy Director incorporated the “medicine wheel,” an Indigenous concept used to emphasize the interaction between physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals. For this respondent, self-care was directly related to the whole pace of the program that reflected higher stress levels, fast pace, high energy and enthusiasm that can be positive but didn’t necessarily work so well with Indigenous ways and efforts to build meaningful programs. Reflecting upon the Deputy Director’s legacy, this respondent comments:

And I think her legacy lives on continuously in that many of the decisions made in each meeting room or each training or approach that is taken, are done so in a much more culturally relevant way. I think it shifted everything in a really important direction and a good direction, as well as she emphasized self-care also amongst Right to Play staff, which sounds like it’s just something internal in our staffing structure, but it was something that also trickles into all the community mentors. When you have program officers running 1,000 miles an hour, community mentors feel the same thing. When you have chaos in here, the emails that are sent or the conversations with community mentors, they end up feeling the same thing. So I think it brought a really necessary calm to the organization. So some of the things that changed greatly were the cultural sensitivity

within the organization. I think that, going into it, there wasn't a judgemental person in the room, no prejudice whatsoever, no racism that you'd ever feel, but I think that there was a lot of things people just didn't consider beforehand. So I think she brought that to the table in a big way, and created a program that felt less like we're Right to Play sweaters and we're in the community, and like a bit more of a joint venture together. And just more of a deeper understanding of everyone that we're working to support. And I think that went through deeply into everybody. (Adrian)

The Deputy Director recognized the difficult nature of the tasks undertaken by PLAY staff. Knowing that sharing circles and self-care activities were already happening with community mentors and members dealing with extreme traumas, she wanted to ensure that the staff was also managing their emotions, experiences and knew where to reach out for help and how to take care of themselves.

You look at the communities, and some of the things that the PLAY staff have to deal with on a consistent basis is that incredibly high rate of loss. Suicide, loss, elders, the elders dying, a loss to natural causes, but loss most often to suicide or violence. And so, it's this continual loss, loss, loss. So, I think that's another piece that I brought to the PLAY program that might not have been there. I actually did critical incident debriefing with all the interns that came back; I would sit with them for two hours—only me and the interns. No other staff were allowed. And it was very, very structured. What did you see? What did you hear? What are you still carrying? What is your plan? How are you now? Do you have resources? (Deputy Director)

By running these cultural training awareness and self-care programs, she grounded the program, creating a supportive, less hierarchical environment where communities and staff could

work together toward the common goal of benefiting Indigenous communities. This shows a more relational leadership approach (Muller, 1998) bound to knowing oneself as well as the community. “Know who you are, know you’re place if you want to build good relations” would repeat the Indigenous leader emphasising on reciprocity and the importance of an holistic version of well-being that would consider mental, spiritual and emotional well-being.

### **Discussion**

Today, the question of culture is recognized as central for Indigenous well-being and is acknowledged as essential in program development. For the case of this SFD program, years of adjustment have brought the question of centering and decentering culture within the program curriculum and within the organization. As a non-Indigenous organization, the PLAY has dealt with the issue by reconfiguring the very aim of the SFD program as supporting culture and by hiring an Indigenous leader at the head of the program. This phase 2012-2014 certainly brought about changes, adjustments and questionings around the question of culture and while absorbing and integrating major learnings from the Indigenous leadership period, this “place of culture” phase ended somehow with the return to previous leadership and the question of culture becoming an option. As explained by respondent:

I think there’s been a couple of different shifts throughout the last couple of years.

Originally when the big expansion happened [2012], in all the curriculum made there was culture woven throughout it. And for some community mentors and communities it was very welcomed. And for others they weren’t comfortable, community mentors weren’t comfortable leading it and didn’t think it should be part of the program. So then all of the culture within the curriculum – anything with cultural references or activities or anything – were pulled out entirely. And it was just like play-based learning. And then that culture

component would come from the trainings where community mentors could opt in or out of sessions on how to integrate culture into your programs. So instead of it being a part of a curriculum, instead of being a cornerstone of the program, it was an option. And it was encouraged by Right to Play and by elders that if culture is something that is within your community that you're working towards bringing into your program, do that in any way you're comfortable. And then where it ended up was during that whole time when we were giving those trainings at our community mentor workshops, we created an Indigenous knowledge guide that was done through elders, through an advisory committee of elders, and through an aboriginal woman that's built her whole career and her life on cultural activities and culture-based activities. So we put together a small package so as to say if you want to include it and you don't know how or you never have or you're not comfortable or you're not sure how it's going to go, and you don't have an elder around to teach you how to do it, this has been created by elders and by people who live and work to do this. (Adrian).

These years certainly shaped the meaningfulness of the program that is still strong today. Even if the core objectives of the program have continued changing through the years, the legacy of those year certainly lives within the enactment of the PLAY in each community (see Kope and Arellano, 2016). This respondent also mentions the creation of a written guide aimed to be used by communities wanting to engage more with culture. As mentioned in the introduction of the Indigenous Knowledge PLAY Guide, this tool "acts as a starting point, opening up discussions on the many ways in which culture is embedded or how we can contribute to the restoration of culture in the work that we do" (Indigenous Knowledge PLAY Guide, 2014).

This brings two questions to the table: what is Indigenization? What changes must be made in an institutional context to create a space for Indigenous Knowledge? Present day research on the meaning of Indigenization provides us with clues as to how we may begin the process of creating the necessary space for Indigenous Knowledge to exist. In discussing the process of Indigenization in the context of the Canadian academic system, Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) acknowledged that “Indigenous scholars argue for an Indigenization that provokes a foundational, intellectual, and structural shift in the academy, requiring the wholesale overhaul of academic norms to better reflect a more meaningful relationship with Indigenous nations” (p. 218). The authors then define and explains three different approaches to Indigenization, namely: Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation Indigenization, and decolonial Indigenization. For the authors, Indigenous inclusion is a policy framework that is concerned with providing the necessary access for Indigenous peoples without undergoing any consequential change within the institution, and it is not for certain that inclusion policies are Indigenization policies. On the contrary, building upon the work of Kuokkanen (2008), Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) contended that reconciliation Indigenization involves acknowledging our position as settlers and “guests in the land of others”, however, power imbalances remain quite present, like a “guest nonetheless in practical control of its hosts’ house” ( Kuokkanen, 2008, pp. 133-134; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, pp. 223). On the opposite end of the spectrum lies decolonial Indigenization, which involves creating the space for Indigenous Knowledge to exist through community-engaged and land-based research practices, elders, ceremonies and on-the land learning opportunities. Overall, the authors informed us that Indigenization requires a “decolonial shift” which requires balanced power relations between Indigenous peoples and Canadians.

The changes that the Indigenous deputy director intended to make and discussed here with relation to the PLAY program reflect what Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) have referred to as a process of “decolonial Indigenization”. As to Indigenizing activities, the Indigenous Deputy Director’s years surely lives through the organization, that is still growing and expanding to several provinces of Canada. The program is now back to more western play-based objectives where healthy living, education and employability (RTP, 2019) are at the core of its activities. Further research should demonstrate how the more recent program changes are enacting resurgence locally, through the community mentors’ leadership. One thing is sure, the teachings provided by the program development phase of this study are crucial for engaging with processes of Indigenization: understanding the shared responsibility of self-education; being ultimately guided by values of self-determination, which locates Indigenous knowledge at the center of programming and Indigenous communities at heart of decision making and accountability; and adopt more relational approaches to leadership by emphasising of staff self-care. While being a non-Indigenous organization and program, these aspects could help orienting organizations towards more meaningful experiences.

Overall, Indigenous scholars have called on us to move beyond the era of government apologies and begin the true journey of reconciliation and transformative decolonization (Alfred, 2010; Hallenbeck et al., 2016). To achieve this, it is important to ensure that our work is grounded in Indigenous values and is respectful of Indigenous ways of life. To indigenize our practices, we must create the necessary “space and mechanisms” to allow Indigenous knowledge to co-exist with Western traditions frameworks (Matunga, 2013, p. 31), which would, in turn, support Indigenous culture.

### Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the experiences of a Western-based SFD program for Indigenous youth in dealing with questions around the place of culture in the program curriculum and organization. While piloting and developing a program that would be youth and community led, the PLAY staff was confronted with the youth's "thirst for culture", experiences that would lead the managers to center culture as the main program objective. The analysis shows how the issue of culture, particularly when it is unknown for the people at the head of a program, can be very challenging. In addition to conducting various program design adjustments, this phase of the PLAY (2012-2014) led the organization to hire an Indigenous Deputy Director at the head of the program, a move that can be seen as an attempt to further Indigenize the program through leadership in the hopes that cultural appropriateness would trickle down to the whole PLAY.

This work revisited semi-structured interviews from 2014, to the staff members including the 2.5 hour interview to the Indigenous Deputy Director. All respondents reflected upon that important period and legacy that played an important role in shaping the program. By discussing the changes brought up by the new leadership, I highlighted not only the centrality of culture to the SFD programing but also the importance of having Indigenous staff and knowledge within the operations and leadership positions. While Indigenous knowledge was felt through the leadership of the new Deputy Director, staff preparedness through education, community visit and ongoing relationships with the communities was essential. Knowing about specific issues such as vicarious trauma, lateral violence or the whole colonial history that affect Indigenous lives is key and has to be lived through the understanding of a collective responsibility. Knowing, learning and being confronted with the importance of culture for Indigenous peoples

has to be seen in relation to self-determination and resurgence, in order to provide the necessary space and mechanisms to allow Indigenous knowledge to co-exist with Western traditional frameworks (Matunga, 2013). In addition, staff self-care, slowing down the pace of the operations and centering the decisions, programing and experiences around the community's interests and well-being is paramount.

### **General Conclusion**

This thesis is composed of two stand-alone articles, with the overall goal to explore how SFD programs designed with and for Indigenous communities can be operated from an Indigenous worldview in order to serve Indigenous resurgence, support reconciliation, and become sustained through Indigenous knowledge. To do this, I magnified a period of transition in the program, which occurred between 2012 and 2014, seeking to understand how a Western-based organization dealt with offering an Indigenous program.

In order to contextualize both articles, the first section of this conclusion consists of the key points from each article. I then take these key points and turn them into lessons learned in order to serve the purpose of the thesis. The next section outlines some limitations of this research project, as well as directions for future research in this field.

### **Summary of Key Points**

In the first article, I utilized a lens grounded in Indigenous studies to highlight the challenges experienced by critical self-reflexive staff members of the PLAY program in their experiences as senior and upper level management employees in an organization working for Indigenous youth. I have started with the idea that, as the SFD field evolves, the quality and meaningfulness of programs should improve through the contribution of more experienced and self-reflexive practitioners (Giulianotti, 2011). As this work shows, program managers and officers interviewed demonstrate high levels of self-reflexivity and a lucid understanding of complex, structural and epistemological issues the SFD sector face while working with Indigenous populations. While these practitioners at the head of the PLAY program highlight challenges within the organization that seem rather difficult to overcome, their perspective offers interesting elements that require important considerations for improving SFD practice.

Challenges such as hierarchical structure of the organization that is located within a hypercompetitive quest for donors system was highlighted and had a trickle-down effect on operations and the general pace of the organization and working environment. Indigenous knowledge also came up as crucial and should be at the heart of program design. This whole discussion around Indigenous knowledge questioned the universality of sport and therefore sport-based programs and their practices. Indigenous knowledge would have more holistic views of what such sport and recreation-based programs should look like and how Indigenous knowledge would understand SFD programs as grounded in Indigenous ways and land-based.

Lastly, the analysis raised the importance of political engagement and activism on behalf of the organization and how the staff could not afford to be neutral in relation to the injustices that Indigenous people are facing and should advocate for deeper structural social and political change. Despite some hope for the field, these obstacles and issues raised by these respondents highlight structural and systemic issues that would be very hard to address by simply amending SFD best practices. This article suggests that despite having self-reflective practitioners with good experience in SFD, more Indigenous staff should be at the heart of program development to favour the program meaningfulness and to ultimately serve resurgence.

In the second article, I was more interested in focusing on the very notion of culture, a concept that was constantly utilized by the PLAY staff and was placed as the core objective of the program in year 3 and 4 (2012-2014). While the aim of this SFD program changed from “supporting children and youth to develop and strengthen essential life-skills” to “build on the strengths of Aboriginal youth and their community, while supporting the value of culture and identity”, we analysed how the staff understood and experienced the confrontation with the issue of culture and how they dealt with having little experience in the matter and partnering with

Indigenous communities and peoples. This also led us explored how the mandate of an Indigenous Deputy Director at the head of the program contributed to indigenize this structure by slowing down this quick pace—or as respondents described it, “slamming the brakes” on a very fast-paced organization.

As seen in the first theme of the findings, respondents share their views on how the youth were “thirsty for culture” and responded so well to culture-based activities. While all communities were unique and had different relationships with these questions – where some Christian-based communities were even reluctant at first to engage with issues of culture, the program staff tried different program structures in order to accommodate this important need and desire from the communities. The staff recognized that, despite the different positionings on culture by the partner communities, the youth still wanted to learn more about their specific cultural traditions and ways, and responded very well to activities that involved any component that incorporated traditions and culture.

While dealing and adjusting the program to address this need and eagerness from the youth, the new Indigenous Deputy Director integrated more values and principles of Indigenization within the organization. Promoting self-education and reflection on the history of colonialism and its impacts on communities, issues of lateral violence, vicarious trauma, all these impacts existing and lived in today’s communities, it is a responsibility that each non-Indigenous staff member needs to work on and carry forward. So the new leader facilitated this process and linked it with issues of reconciliation and as essential principles for a Western-based organization. The Indigenous leader also emphasized on transforming the logic of accountability where she made everyone’s actions, decisions and operations being consciously and systematically grounded on Indigenous needs and interests. She brought more calm and began a

process of re-thinking the PLAY in light of Indigenous-centered needs, interests and knowledge. Finally, another theme emerging from the analysis was centered around the idea of self-care, that I linked to a leadership style more relational, where the Deputy Director would work with each staff member to help them develop strategies for personal well-being and for coping with the stories of trauma, grief or just with the fast pace everyday work life they were experiencing in their job.

Overall, while these two separate and self-contained analysis had different purpose, both works raised similar and interconnected findings. The perceived challenges and concerns presented by the staff members were ultimately related to questioning western ways and how challenging it can be to craft meaningful programs in a competitive and performance-based environment and system. The socioeconomic context makes it hard to design programs that truly consider the cultural differences from these communities, programs crafted in link with more targeted and specialised services and taking into account social issues such as suicide, mental health or addictions. The need for Indigenous staff, or ultimately, the need for more activism and political engagement from the part of the organization can also be linked to the discussion raised in the second article, where Indigenous leadership can help a process of Indigenization of the organization by focusing on training non-Indigenous staff, hiring more Indigenous people at the head of the program, engaging with culture difference or ultimately handing over to Indigenous people the program by truly adopting Indigenous leaders, principles and knowledge at the helm of the organization.

The timeframe studied in this thesis does not allow to further this reflection beyond 2014. In the meantime, the PLAY has continued evolving, adjusting, growing and doing great things for Indigenous youth. While the question of culture at the end of this studies period became an

“option”, it is interesting to note that today, the most recent objective of the PLAY program is to deliver “play-based programs that promote healthy living, healthy relationships, education and employability life-skills”, which suggests a return to Western-base values. However, the program continues expanding, now including Newfoundland and Labrador (2019), and reaches thousands of Indigenous youth in Canada. The PLAY may be today the great example of a work of reconciliation, having reached a good balance with all the challenges presented in this thesis and assuming the work of culture may be re-enacted and appropriated within each local community’s implementation. The question remains, should an Indigenous organization be still leading this program? In light of self-determination, resurgence and settler colonialism, this could be a question for future research.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation of this study is that I am of non-Indigenous decent, and despite my best efforts to read the work of Indigenous scholars, gain a deep understanding of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge, and ground my analysis in Indigenous studies, the results of the research still express my personal worldview and the western traditions of the education system and knowledge production.

This research relies on secondary data. I did not experience the program on a personal level, nor did I take part in any of the training workshops, visit the communities, or speak to any of the staff or program managers myself. However, I did work with my supervising professor, who was the principal investigator of this research program and worked with a range of reports, field notes and deep conversations around her experiences with the PLAY. I also based this research on interviews mostly to non-Indigenous respondents, even though I have focused on the work and thoughts of the Indigenous Deputy Director. More work on the communities and how

they receive and enact their own culture within the program was done elsewhere (Kope & Arellano, 2016; Arellano & Downey, 2018), and should be carried on, which is also important and complements the objectives of the larger research program.

### **Final Reflection**

This work has emphasized the importance of being open to the fact that Indigenous knowledge is a system of knowledge which holds a different set of values and understanding of the world (Battiste, 2005). As Indigenous scholars have highlighted, decolonizing our practices requires a structural and fundamental change that allows Indigenous Knowledge to exist in institutions, programs and spaces (Simpson, 2011; Battiste, 2005; Varley, 2016). This means that programs that wish to serve Indigenous resurgence must understand and challenge the structural reproduction of inequalities and status quo, while avoiding replacing Indigenous culture; they must rather seek to honour and revitalize it. Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) proposed 3 different Indigenization frameworks, one being Indigenous inclusion and the other decolonial Indigenization. The authors proposed that rather than changing programs to be more “inclusive” of Indigenous ways, Decolonial Indigenization requires a balance of power between Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems through community-based and land-engaged practices. Overall, Indigenous Knowledge should be at the heart of programming, and the SFD field is no exception.

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**CERTIFICAT D'APPROBATION ÉTHIQUE | CERTIFICATE OF ETHICS APPROVAL****Numéro du dossier / Ethics File Number**

H-10-18-1271

**Titre du projet / Project Title**

Creating Space for Indigenous Knowledge in a Sport for Development Initiative for Indigenous Youth

**Type de projet / Project Type**

Thèse de maîtrise / Master's thesis

**Statut du projet / Project Status**

Approuvé / Approved

**Date d'approbation (jj/mm/aaaa) / Approval Date (dd/mm/yyyy)**

16/11/2018

**Date d'expiration (jj/mm/aaaa) / Expiry Date (dd/mm/yyyy)**

15/11/2019

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Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

## University of Ottawa

Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Le Comité d'éthique de la recherche (CÉR) de l'Université d'Ottawa, opérant conformément à l'*Énoncé de politique des Trois conseils* (2014) et toutes autres lois et tous règlements applicables, a examiné et approuvé la demande d'éthique du projet de recherche ci-nommé.

L'approbation est valide pour la durée indiquée plus haut et est soumise aux conditions énumérées dans la section intitulée "Conditions Spéciales ou Commentaires". Le formulaire « Renouvellement ou Fermeture de Projet » doit être complété quatre semaines avant la date d'échéance indiquée ci-haut afin de demander un renouvellement de cette approbation éthique ou afin de fermer le dossier.

Toutes modifications apportées au projet doivent être approuvées par le CÉR avant leur mise en place, sauf si le participant doit être retiré en raison d'un danger immédiat ou s'il s'agit d'un changement ayant trait à des éléments administratifs ou logistiques du projet. Les chercheurs doivent aviser le CÉR dans les plus brefs délais de tout changement pouvant augmenter le niveau de risque aux participants ou pouvant affecter considérablement le déroulement du projet, rapporter tout événement imprévu ou indésirable et soumettre toute nouvelle information pouvant nuire à la conduite du projet ou à la sécurité des participants.

The University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board, which operates in accordance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (2014) and other applicable laws and regulations, has examined and approved the ethics application for the above-named research project.

Ethics approval is valid for the period indicated above and is subject to the conditions listed in the section entitled "Special Conditions or Comments". The "Renewal/Project Closure" form must be completed four weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to request a renewal of this ethics approval or closure of the file.

Any changes made to the project must be approved by the REB before being implemented, except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) only pertain to administrative or logistical components of the project. Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes that increase the risk to participant(s), any changes that considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project or the safety of the participant(s).