

Theoretical Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Connections to Saskatchewan Curriculum and Indigenous Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the attributes of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as well as its theoretical foundations. Gay's (2018) work describes the eight attributes of CRT as validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. After unpacking each attribute, I present and discuss four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT which include culturally diverse curriculum, teacher caring, home and school connection, and academic achievement. Further, I write about how CRT and the epistemologies of Indigenous education can lead to healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan public schools. For the purposes of this paper, I define healthy and transformative spaces as spaces where students have their needs met in the four dimensions of spirit, mental, physical, and emotional health.

Keywords: Indigenous education, culturally responsive teaching, students, education, healthy and transformative spaces



Theoretical Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Connections to Saskatchewan Curriculum and Indigenous Education

This paper examines the attributes of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as well as its theoretical foundations. According to Gay (2018), “culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction for multiethnic cultures frames of reference” (p. xxvii). I will be taking the eight attributes of the theoretical foundation of CRT and unpack each of them. Gay’s (2018) work describes the eight attributes of CRT as validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. I will define what Gay means by each attribute and then I will relate them to the scholarship on Indigenous education. After unpacking each attribute, I will present and discuss four dimensions of Gay’s (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT. I will explore how both CRT and the epistemologies of Indigenous education can lead to healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan.

Four Dimensions of Health

In this paper, healthy and transformative spaces are spaces where students have their needs met in the four dimensions of spirit, mental, physical, and emotional health. It is important for students to have healthy spaces in their educational careers so they can thrive at school. There are four dimensions of health that can be found within Indigenous perspectives on health including spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health (Warren, 2013). Indigenous spirituality is holistic and closely related to culture (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Mental wellness for Indigenous peoples is having a purpose in daily life, hope for the future, a sense of belonging, and a sense of meaning in life (Indigenous Services Canada, 2015). Physical wellness for Indigenous peoples is living a healthy, active lifestyle to maintain physical strength, fitness, and health (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013). Emotional wellness for Indigenous peoples can refer to affective or mood elements (Tanner et al., 2022).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

CRT is described by Gay (2002) as, “using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively” (p. 106). CRT works from the assumption that mainstream education is based on the norms of whiteness (Gay 2018; Pete, 2017; Taylor & Sobel, 2011). According to Chandler and Wiborg (2021), “Whiteness norms are recurring patterns of behaviors that systematically benefit White people” (p. 714). An education system that is based on the norms of whiteness does not work for many diverse students, including many Indigenous students, because it privileges Western ways of knowing and being. Unfortunately, an education system based on norms of Whiteness has created achievement gaps between non-White students and White students (Castellano et al., 2000; Lee & Buxton, 2011; Rico, 2013; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Styres, 2017).

One area of scholarship that explores how to create healthy and transformative spaces for diverse students in education is CRT. The theoretical foundations of CRT can be partially attributed to the work of Geneva Gay (2002, 2010, 2018). Gay is amongst many other scholars who have helped to construct theories of CRT (Au 1993; Delpit, 1995; Irvine 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Nieto, 2013). According to Gay (2018), there are eight qualitative attributes or distinguishing traits of CRT: it is validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. This paper is structured around unpacking these eight attributes.

The theories of CRT connect with the epistemologies of Indigenous education, and this will be explored throughout the paper. There are Indigenous scholars who use CRT in their research on Indigenous education (Au, 2009; Klug, 2012; Nicol et al., 2020; Pete, 2017). Indigenous education scholarship describes the ways that CRT has benefitted and continues to benefit Indigenous children and youth and there are also many elements from the epistemologies of Indigenous education that align with CRT.

It is critical to look at Indigenous history to understand why CRT resonates with the epistemologies of Indigenous education. Across Canada and the United States, governments have been involved in the assimilation of Indigenous people into Western culture (Klug, 2012; Sinclair 2007; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). In Saskatchewan, the residential school system had an incredibly negative impact on Indigenous people in the province, and to this day there are many intergenerational impacts on Indigenous students and their families in Saskatchewan public schools. The residential school system aimed to assimilate Indigenous families into a White society and to strip students from their own cultures (Rico, 2013). In opposition to assimilation into Whiteness, CRT provides the opportunity for teachers to include the cultures of their students in the classroom.

Attributes of Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Gay (2018), there are eight attributes of CRT, each of which I will discuss here by unpacking them one by one.

First, CRT is validating of non-White students by acknowledging the use of cultural heritages of students as content in formal curriculum (Aguilera et al., 2007; Gay, 2018; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Rychly & Graves, 2012). For Saskatchewan teachers, this means an acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures as content within the provincial curriculum, not as the odd outcome or indicator found in the Saskatchewan curriculum, but as a core understanding within all of the Saskatchewan curricular outcomes.

The use of cultural heritages means authentic integrations of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in daily practices. CRT makes meaningful connections to local community cultures (Vavrus, 2008), for example, within Saskatchewan public schools a meaningful connection to local cultures includes Indigenous nations that can be found within the province. The cultural heritages of Indigenous students in Saskatchewan play a valuable role in the classroom. Indigenous education scholarship champions cultural learning opportunities in classrooms and curriculum (Castellano, 2000; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; King, 2017; Saysewahum, 2009; Smith, 2001). Toulouse (2018) wrote about many traditional values that can be utilized as learning opportunities in the classroom, for example, stewardship of the land, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution. These traditional Indigenous values can be integrated into the Saskatchewan curriculum through land-based learning experiences, learning about respect from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and by learning about traditional forms of justice.

Moving on to Gay's (2018) second theoretical attribute, CRT is comprehensive and inclusive. She wrote that CRT is about teaching the whole child. To teach the whole child is to provide learning opportunities that develop intellectual, social, political, and emotional aspects of the child to teach skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Holistic teaching provides opportunities for learning outside of the provincial curriculum. The idea of holistic learning resonates with the epistemologies of Indigenous education because holistic learning promotes the development of the whole child (Ermine, 1995; Goulet & Goulet, 2014;

Peltier, 2021; Stowe, 2017; Toulouse, 2016a). For example, Cajete (2019) argued that western science takes a fragmented approach to learning about science whereas an Indigenous approach to science is about relationships and reciprocity with the physical world. A culturally responsive approach, like Indigenous education, is to teach curriculum using a holistic framework.

Gay's (2018) third attribute of CRT is that it is multidimensional and includes curriculum content, student-teacher relationships, instructional approaches, student management, and classroom climate (Gay, 2018; Lewthwaite et al., 2014). For teachers to create healthy and transformative spaces for their Indigenous students, they need to take into consideration all parts of their classroom practices. Students require to have their needs met in all four quadrants of health: spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional and these needs are met in different parts of their day by, for example, building relationships with a student might help meet their emotional needs, and a classroom climate that feels safe will help with meeting the physical needs of Indigenous students. There will be many considerations to make throughout the day to ensure the four quadrants are being balanced.

This multidimensional attribute can relate to the epistemologies of Indigenous education. In Toulouse's (2016b) teaching guides on achieving Indigenous student success, she not only includes curriculum content, but also classroom management ideas, extensions, historical facts, and traditional uses. Using a multidimensional approach - is valuable to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. The epistemologies of Indigenous education have a holistic focus. McIntosh et al. (2014) described, "an Indigenous approach to education involves connecting with Elders, engaging with the community, inclusion of students' culture and experiences, and actively teaching social responsibility" (p. 240). This approach demonstrates how Indigenous education is much more than academic subjects.

The fourth attribute of CRT, according to Gay (2018), is how it can be empowering through academic achievement, courage, and confidence (Aguilera et al., 2007; Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003; Gay, 2018). Gay (2018) wrote that once students believe they can succeed, they will pursue a task until mastery is met. The Indigenous concept of persistence can be related to Gay's empowerment by examining the Circle of Courage model. This model grounds the work of positive youth development on the Native American values of mastery, generosity, independence, and belonging (Brendtro et al., 2002). The Circle of Courage models encourage academic achievement through courage and balancing the four sections of the medicine wheel.

The fifth attribute outlined by Gay (2018) is how CRT is transformative and does not rely on traditional formal educational practices. To create healthy and transformative spaces that nurture the four quadrants of health, teachers will have to learn about and reflect on the colonial education system they participate in each day in Saskatchewan. Teachers must be willing to move away from traditional educational practices that continue to negatively impact Indigenous learners in their classrooms. Since CRT moves away from traditional education practice, Gay (2013) states teachers should expect resistance to this way of teaching. Teachers might find resistance from administrators or families for engaging in culturally responsive practices; when, for example, exploring social justice issues. The epistemologies of Indigenous education offers alternatives to traditional educational practices (Bell, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Toulouse, 2016b). Indigenous scholar Toulouse (2016a) described how she came to her work as an Aboriginal student success workshop facilitator based on her own experiences in the educational system and her personal life. Many of her teaching guides provide lesson ideas that veer away from traditional

education practices, such as using humour, and they have potential to transform students, classrooms, and schools.

Gay's (2018) sixth attribute, emancipatory CRT, described how the ideas of connectedness, community, and cooperation are keys to an emancipatory approach. These concepts are at odds with some of the neoliberal approaches to education that can be found within Saskatchewan public schools, such as the use of standardized testing (LeBlanc, 2011; Orłowski, 2015). Sleeter (2011) wrote that neoliberalism in schools focuses on individualism and competition. To foster concepts of community and cooperation, some major shifts might need to be taken by teachers in the name of a healthier and transformative space for their Indigenous students. These concepts are not to be mistaken with lowering expectations of students and not challenging students (Howard & Terry Sr, 2011). Students can still succeed academically at the same time as connecting and cooperating with their peers in their classroom. Despite neoliberal beliefs of individualism, working as a collective can help students to be successful in their studies.

The concepts of connectedness, community, and cooperation are familiar within the literature on Indigenous education (Au, 2009; Brendtro et al., 2002; Cajete, 2019; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Little Bear, 2012). For example, Goulet and Goulet (2014) suggested the practice of *weechiseechigemitowin* (alliances for collaborative action) which is a Cree practice of interactive learning with another. Another example, is the invitation of Indigenous community such as Elders, Metis senators and other Indigenous resource people into the classroom (Toulouse, 2016b). Indigenous Elders are an integral part of Indigenous community, and this brings actual community into the classroom. An Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or other Indigenous resource person can bring in concepts of connectedness and cooperation within their teachings.

The seventh attribute of CRT is that it is humanistic (Gay, 2018). This attribute can be a challenge for teachers since it involves considering how they might facilitate independent learning experiences for the students in their classroom. Independent learning experiences can be transformative spaces for students in the mental dimension as it allows for students to engage in personal learning projects that are meaningful to them.

Finally, CRT is both normative and ethical (Gay, 2018), in that most schools provide an education that is primarily responsive to a Eurocentric culture and not responsive to students of colour (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). Western ways of knowing are so entrenched in educational practices that it can be difficult to see how Eurocentric ways are dominating teaching practices. Gay (2018) argued that an ethical approach is to have ethnically diverse culturally responsive teaching so that minority groups of colour are given the same rights and opportunities currently provided to majority group students. An ethnically diverse culturally responsive approach to teaching has the potential to address the need for healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan public schools, in the emotional realm. Indigenous students deserve to feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms and schools.

To summarize, the attributes of CRT include acknowledging the use of cultural heritage of students in formal curriculum, ensuring that both informal and formal curriculum is comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and lastly is normative and ethical (Gay, 2018).

In the next section, I present and discuss the four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT: ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum, teacher caring, home and school connection, and academic achievement.

Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Curriculum

One fundamental goal of CRT is empowering students through ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). In Saskatchewan, authentic cultural teaching resources are available for teachers to use through such places as the Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, Emma Stewart Resource Centre, and in many school libraries and school divisions. Resources created through local Indigenous organizations have been created by individuals that belong to the Indigenous community (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Toulouse, 2016b). The resources created by local Indigenous community members will likely be reflective of the Indigenous learners in Saskatchewan public schools. It can be empowering for students to see themselves reflected in the resources they are using in their classrooms. To create a healthy and transformative space in terms of mental and emotional health for Indigenous students, they need to learn from relevant curriculum that authentically reflects their background as Indigenous students.

Good quality textbooks are key to the achievement of diverse students because they are a common source for curriculum content (Gay, 2018; Stowe, 2017). It is important for teachers in Saskatchewan to review textbooks they commonly use in their teaching and check them for quality. Checking textbooks for quality is an important task, however many educators are utilizing resources for teaching that are not textbooks. There are many culturally damaging resources being sold or utilized from such websites as Teachers Pay Teachers and Pinterest. Websites like these ones are appealing to educators because they are easily accessible. However, many resources with Indigenous content promote stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, such as Indigenous peoples belong in the past (Toulouse, 2016b).

Teacher Caring

The second dimension of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT that I explore here is teacher caring. One component of CRT that many scholars have contributed to is the idea of teacher caring (Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003, Gay, 2018)). The term *caring* in the theory of teacher caring is not a synonym of *kind* or *nice* but instead a description for teachers unwilling to tolerate underachievement of diverse students (Rhychly & Graves, 2012). These teacher caring ideas provide several practical options for teachers to implement in their own classroom spaces. For example, one component of teacher caring is creating spaces for diverse students to be recognized, valued, and heard (Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003). Having spaces for Indigenous students to feel recognized, valued, and heard provides an opportunity for students to go to a healthy space in their schools where their mental and emotional needs are met.

Scholarship focusing on Indigenous education also reflects on the importance of such spaces for Indigenous students to be recognized (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; McIntosh, 2014). Teachers can re-imagine healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in our classrooms and schools by, for example, having a space for students to smudge with traditional medicines so they can have their spiritual needs met. Spaces for traditional practices are healthy for Indigenous students and can transform colonial classroom spaces into safe spaces. One such space is an *Indigenous space*, suggested by Johnston (2019) which is a space that “refers to the recognition, theory, and practice of worldviews that draw from knowledge bases that encompass the ways in which Indigenous Peoples think about their world and articulate their relationships within their world” (p. 485). Indigenous students can have their physical health needs met in spaces that honour and recognize their unique worldviews.

There are several ways for a teacher to practice teaching caring. Another component of teaching caring is finding ways to discover knowledge and learning about students beyond the school day and the school as an organization (Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003). There are many community events throughout Saskatchewan that Indigenous students participate in, from sports to cultural events like pow-wows and round dances. These are spaces for educators to learn more about Indigenous students, families, and community in a respectful way. Imagine the impact of educators coming to non-colonial spaces to learn and be with their student community. Teachers can get to know about the lives of their students if they are willing to do this learning outside of institutions. Indigenous education scholars also write about the importance of creating and nurturing relationships outside of the school organization (Brendtro et al., 2002; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Indigenous scholar Toulouse (2016b) suggests building relationships with the local Indigenous community or organizations. This bridges Indigenous community with the school and classroom.

A third idea related to teacher caring is aiding racialized students in developing a critical consciousness (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011), which necessarily calls for teachers to build their own critical consciousness. Once teachers start to build their own critical consciousness, they will be able to bridge these learnings with their own students. It is important for students to develop a critical consciousness so they can engage in civic and social justice issues in their communities (Bassey, 2016). There are many civic and social issues that impact Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan, and it can be powerful for Indigenous students to engage in these issues for the betterment of their community.

Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate caring-in-action by having affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers are challenged to provide educational experiences that validate students' cultures (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). These types of educational experiences will create healthy and transformative spaces in education for Indigenous students. The affirmation of views for students with diverse backgrounds is not just celebrating their culture (Sleeter, 2011). Instead, teachers will be challenged to reflect on the ways they may be viewing their diverse students through a deficit lens and to interrogate why they think that way. A deficit lens is one where a teacher has less expectations of students because of behaviours, family dynamics, or negative assumptions.

Teachers who subscribe to culturally responsive caring-in-action help students deal with racism and discuss the unequal distribution of power and privilege amongst different groups (Gay, 2018). Discussing racism in the classroom can be a sensitive and difficult discussion for some educators and for students. The reality for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan schools is that they face racism regularly. Educators are doing a disservice to Indigenous students when they avoid such topics as racism in classroom discussions and activities. In her writing on strengthening CRT, Sleeter (2011) argued that you cannot substitute culture for political analysis as that approach ignores racism and oppression. While CRT can offer a powerful experience for students to have their culture integrated into activities, it cannot replace learning about uncomfortable topics such as racism in Saskatchewan.

Indigenous education scholarship also explores the importance of teaching students about racism. As Goulet and Goulet (2014) argued, "When improvements in Indigenous education focus primarily on cultural programming, taught within the framework of current schooling practices, the initiatives do not expose or challenge power relationships within our society" (p. 22). One of the misconceptions about CRT is that it is only focused on cultural teaching. Instead, what can be

powerful about culturally responsive teaching is the ability to bring culture into the classroom and still challenge and disrupt real-world issues such as racism that impact students.

Home and School Connection

CRT recognizes that students bring strengths from their home cultures to school (Au, 2001; Gay 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011; Pete, 2017). Students have lived experiences outside of school that can be included in classroom learning experiences (Gay, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These connections will need to be deeper than food, dress, and special holidays or celebrations. For teachers to learn about the home cultures of their students, they will need to engage directly with their students, their students' families, and the wider community. Stowe (2017), a teacher and scholar, writes about her experiences with culturally responsive teaching in an Oglala Lakota classroom and how this required immersing herself in the Lakota community. There is no better way to get to know more about a community than immersing oneself into it.

One of the misconceptions of CRT is the role of the teacher to teach culture to their students (Pete, 2017; Sleeter, 2015). Most Indigenous students come to school with their own understandings of their culture that comes from their family and community. It is the role of the teacher to bridge these understandings with provincial curriculum by allowing students to write about their culture in English language arts for example. In situations where a teacher would like to bring in traditional knowledge, they can invite an Elder, knowledge keeper, or Indigenous resource person into their classroom to learn from. In fact, in many instances, there is Indigenous knowledge that is not to be shared by anybody but the Elders and Knowledge keepers in First Nations communities (Saysewahum, 2009). Ideally, teachers will need to learn about the cultural backgrounds of their student and think of respectful ways to integrate this information into classroom learning.

Indigenous education promotes a connection between home and school life (Bell, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Kowaluk, 2016, Toulouse, 2016b). Although some progresses have been made, Western education systems continue to separate the home and school lives of students. According to McIntosh et al. (2014), "Traditional Indigenous education focuses on the community as a whole and is based on the assumption that individual learning is inextricably linked to communal well-being" (p. 239). An Indigenous approach to education does not separate or compartmentalize parts of learning. Instead, learning that happens both in school and out of school are important.

Academic Achievement

CRT is an approach that can be used to improve the academic achievement of students of colour (Au, 2009; Gay 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). Similarly, CRT can be used to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students in Saskatchewan public schools. One example of creating academic achievement is through caring interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Ayers 2004; Gay 2018; Thompson 2004). One way to create a healthy and transformative space in education for Indigenous students is through improved relationships using teacher caring. There are a variety of approaches that can be taken to build stronger teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

Relationships are foundational to Indigenous education, and Indigenous scholars have written extensively in this area (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, Toulouse, 2016b). Some ideas shared by Indigenous scholar, Kowaluk (2016), focus on for relationship-building including learning about

the composition of a student's family, favourite activities, as well as student strengths and concerns. These are very practical ideas that can be utilized by teachers to create a healthy and transformative space for their Indigenous students. Au (2009) wrote that establishing positive relationships with students is a general principle of good teaching; however, relationship-building might differ between cultural backgrounds of students. Most teachers have engaged in relationship building with their students, but they might need to consider other ways that are more reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

One way that CRT can improve academic achievement of students of color is through challenging deficit-based thinking (Howard & Terry Sr., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2014; Sleeter, 2015). For Indigenous students to succeed academically in Saskatchewan public schools they need to have educators that believe in them. Teachers should reflect on why they may be looking at their Indigenous students through a deficit-lens and commit to challenging those beliefs. Adopting a CRT means committing to the belief that *all* students will achieve academic excellence regardless of their culture, race, backgrounds, and language (Taylor & Sobel, 2011). One way to disrupt deficit-thinking is believing that all the students in a classroom can and will be successful. A classroom space where educators believe the best in their Indigenous students is a healthy one because Indigenous students will have their mental needs met in that space.

To improve the academic achievement of students of colour it is necessary to use academic rigor and have high expectations of students (Gay, 2015; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011; Taylor & Sobel, 2011). Ostensibly, to create healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students, educators need to use instructional practices that engage and promote academic rigor. There are real consequences for Indigenous students when teachers have lower expectations of them. McIntosh et al. (2014) state that many Indigenous students are placed in life skills or vocations programs because of teacher low expectations of them. Considering the consequences of lowered expectations with teachers can help them to understand the importance of academic rigor for Indigenous students. It is also important to reflect on academic success and failure as institutionalized discrimination instead of individual "achievement" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Having high expectations of Indigenous students is a form of resistance against institutionalized discrimination.

Academic achievement is often described as mastering academic subjects and getting high test scores (Lopez et al., 2013). However, as Gay (2015) argued, "School achievement is more than academics, and as such it involves more than mastering subject matter content knowledge" (p. 132). Culturally responsive educators are encouraged to develop student outcomes that are not necessarily linked to academic achievement (Sleeter, 2015). Scholars De Jesus (2000) and Bensman (2003) ask culturally responsive educators to explore areas of students' interest and curiosity. For an Indigenous student this might look like an interest in dancing pow-wow or learning how to do beadwork. When children have a chance to see themselves in their learning content it sustains engagement in learning (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Lopez et al., 2013; Stowe, 2017). An idea for teachers is to learn about their students' interests and determine how they can fit this information into their lesson and unit planning. The engagement in student interests will create a healthy and transformative space where students will have a learning space that meets their mental needs in a better way.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper explored the theoretical foundations of CRT, including the eight attributes and the four dimensions of CRT based on the work of Gay (2018). The eight attributes of CRT include: validating, being comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, being empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. The four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations include ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum, teacher caring, home and school connection, and academic achievement. I summarize here how the eight attributes of culturally responsive teaching can create healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students.

The attribute of validating provides opportunities to non-White students to have their cultural heritage as content in formal curriculum (Aguilera et al., 2007; Gay, 2018; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Rychly & Graves, 2012). Being comprehensive and inclusive would have culturally responsive teachers teach the whole child (Gay, 2018). The attribute of being multidimensional requires adaptations to curriculum content, student-teacher relationships, instructional approaches, student management, and classroom climate (Gay, 2018; Lewthwaite et al., 2014). The attribute of being empowering is through academic achievement, courage, and confidence (Aguilera et al., 2007; Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003; Gay, 2018). Being transformative would have culturally responsive teachers not relying on formal traditional educational practices while the attribute of being emancipatory is connected to ideas of connectedness, community, and cooperation (Gay, 2018). The seventh attribute of being humanistic would have culturally responsive teachers considering how to facilitate independent learning experiences for students (Gay, 2018). Last, being normative and ethical would have culturally responsive teachers afford the same rights and opportunities to students of colour as are provided to majority group students (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). Healthy and transformative spaces for students are significant to Indigenous students because they deserve to feel a sense of belonging and pride in their classrooms and schools. I hope readers of this paper can imagine how they might use these eight attributes to improve educational experiences and spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan classrooms and beyond.

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