MM: Welcome to the third episode of the Conversational Métis Sash! This episode took place in person and virtually with Dr. Yvonne Poitras Pratt. Dr. Poitras Pratt is a Métis scholar, professor, mother, kokum, and research excellence chair at the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary. Our conversation honours the brilliance of knowing who we our through our stories, our families, our histories, and how who we are can be honoured as pedagogy and within educational practices. Not only this, but we need to work together in good and ethical ways, to ask educators to respond to reconciliation through teaching our truths.

YPP: Yeah. Yeah, certainly. (laughter from both MM and YPP).

MM: Perfect.

YPP: All right.

MM: Well, kih-chi maarsii for being able meet with me today. I'm so grateful to be able to meet with you in person and to visit with you in this good way. The conversation before the conversation. Really is what's most important for us. (Laughter of YPP and MM).

YPP: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely.

MM: And I know with folks, too, for the various wonderful people that I've met, I know that we like to introduce ourselves because we're the best at it (laughter of MM).

YPP: That's often true. Yeah. Yeah. (Laughter of YPP and MM).

MM: Could you please share a little bit about yourself, too?

YPP: All right. Well, thank you for that and for the honor able to speak with you, Madelaine, as you head into your Ph.D. So, I'm Yvonne Poitras Pratt, and I have probably, since I started my graduate studies, reinserted the name Poitras, which is my Métis family name, into my professional naming because I wanted to honor the lineage of my Métis family. And so, I described myself or have had myself described by others as holding a dual pedigree in Métis-ness. And so, when I heard that, I thought, “Wow, I've never actually heard of myself, and my lineages being described in that manner.” So, I've kind of I've become quite fond of that. So, I come from on my father's side, the Poitras family. I have a lot of knowledge around the Poitras family, mostly because of my late cousin Gordon Poitras. So, he famously was married to Audrey, who was sort of a longstanding leader of the Métis Nation of Alberta. And when I decided to go back to school, I was looking at different funding opportunities to enter graduate studies. And so I was, you know, asking community what was out there to support Métis students. And Gordon arrived at my door. So, he lives up in Edmonton but had heard that I wanted to learn about the Poitras family, and I answered the door there he was with a large roll under his arm, and he said, “I've heard that you want to learn about your family, your Poitras family.” And I said, “Yes!” And, you know, I'd attempted to go down to the Glenbow Museum

and work with the Dene Papers, and it was just all so confusing and overwhelming. And, you know, I'd heard little bits from family stories, but they didn't make sense.

MM: Hmmmmm.

YPP: And I think that's largely because the story has been so silenced. And so, this is a long-winded introduction, but it tells you, I think, about the journey of discovery. And so, Gordon said, okay, move your furniture aside. We brought a long family history (MM laughter). And so, he let the roll go, and it spun across my living room floor, and he traced our Poitras family back to 1640. And so, our ancestor André Poitras arrived from France in the year 1640. He was a carpenter, apparently, and yeah, so he was the first European ancestor to arrive on the shores. And from there, Gordon showed me all the beautiful ways in which the Poitras family have become involved in the fur trade and later in the provisional government. So, Pierre Poitras, my great-great-grandfather, sat on the provisional government with Louis Riel.

MM: Oh, yes, of yeah! Yeah, John Bruce on my side. Oh, yeah. (Laughter of MM and YPP) great-uncle. Yeah (laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: So, I love that, when I say that often. When we are speaking Métis to Métis, we get these beautiful connections, and so that 1869-70 provisional government picture, people go, That's my ancestors, my relatives. And so yeah, those connections. So, Pierre was to love to out we hear through family stories. He was a lawyer.

MM: Mmmmm.

YPP: I haven't had that fully confirmed yet, but that's what family stories say.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: So, yeah, Gordon led me through this beautiful evolution of who the Poitras originally came from and then who we married with. And, you know, the part of the story that I'd really love to know more about are the women.

MM: Mmmmm.

YPP: And so, you know, we, we've got a really strong male side of the story. Louis Kwarakwante Calihoo, don't know how to say that properly. So, he came west and apparently my family lines interweave with that heritage. But there is, at least from what I've seen so far, at least six, possibly eight First Nations lineages that are woven within our, our family stories on the Poitras side. Now, this is probably the longest introduction you're ever going to get (MM/YPP laughter).

On my mother's side, we have just recently discovered a lot about her Métis family history. So, she's Fayant and yeah, so Poitras… Fayant… On my mother's side, we'd always just heard rumours that there was a little bit of Cree there, maybe some Saulteaux, they weren't quite sure. And so, I've been taking my mother, who is in her mid-eighties down to Cypress Hills for the Hills Are Alive event. And so, you know, she's there and just really absorbed in all the beautiful music and all of the culture that's being taught there. But I ended up spending about 4 hours with Darcy McRae, who's our local Métis family historian, genealogist. And I said, "You know, know a lot about the Poitras side, but I don't know that much about the Fayant side." And so, he said, "Yvonne, give me one key route ancestor and I'll help you." And so, 4 hours later, we discovered that the Fayants were here five generations before the arrival of the North-West Mounted Police. There are records of a Blackfoot woman, and that's how those records arrive, right? As part of our family lineage. It later evolved into the Lemier family, who are a part of the Tsuut'ina family lines. So the Métis are interwoven with many of the First Nations here at southern Alberta. Now, this is a highly contentious area currently for many of our Blackfoot relatives, and I'm using that term deliberately because the stories of the Métis are not known.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: And there's so much misunderstandings around the Métis. And so, what I am finding out and this was as recently as six months ago. Darcy had sent me a text and he said, "Yvonne, guess what?" I was like, "I can't guess, please tell me!" (MM laughter). And he said, "Paul Fayant…" and Fayant is spelled with a G and a Y, so it's F A G N A N T historically.

MM: Historically, historically okay.

YPP: And the Fayant with F A Y A N T contemporarily. He said, "So he held a scrip in Calgary." I said, "Excuse me?" He said, "Not only in Calgary… it was on the Stampede Grounds." Yeah, exactly. So. And he said, he said, "You know how you and Doreen Bergham of the Dumont family, you know, your close friends?" And I said, "Yeah." I said, "I feel this natural affinity with Bruce, Dumont, and Doreen, and Marilyn, of course, up at the University in Alberta." He said, "Yeah, they were your neighbours. They were your family's neighbours." I was like, "Wow." So, I don't even know what to do with that…

MM: Yeah.

YPP: Lineage… I don't know what to do with that presence here in Calgary. So, these all sorts of I think what I share with you are revelations as Métis people and those of us that are in education, that are scholars. This is our everyday kind of existence, right? We draw on these beautiful, rich pasts, you know, on the Poitras side, eventually. Pierre, who sat on the provincial government, his son Elzear Poitras, whose image looks down on us from the back. He started up

first hotel in Saint-Paul-des-Métis (Alberta) and so on the shelves behind you, is that story captured in the Saint Paul history.

MM: Wow… wow.

YPP: So these bits of Métis history, these fragments of history, you know, part of my role now is really trying to pull together these fragments into a cohesive narrative of who we are as Métis people, because that's just been erased from who we are. And, you know, I work deeply with community. So, in introducing myself, you had to understand my past.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: You had to understand what I'm learning every day about myself as a Métis person. And because, you know, I'm looking, as a new kokum, I'm now looking to the new generation of Métis scholars and how I can help mentor folks like yourself into your roles, into community. And so, yeah, so share this very long-winded introduction (MM laughter). In the storytelling way, because it carries strands. And so, what I've learned now as I enter life and reluctantly being called a Knowledge Keeper, is that what I have really learned is that we bring stories to the table that different people will take different strands from and so it's not that I have a singular bit of wisdom to pass on, but instead I, I present this tapestry of stories.

MM: Mmmmmm.

YPP: From which you might be able to draw something that will help you in your own life or that will help you help someone else. And so that, my dear (MM laughter), is the introduction of who I am (laughter of MM/YPP).

MM: And it beautifully connects to my second question for you, which is what does being Métis mean to you?

YPP: Oh, gosh, another loaded question.

MM: I know! (Laughter).

YPP: What does being Métis mean? Yeah, so yeah, so I have come to learn. So, I began with Werklund here at the University of Calgary since 2013. And what I have come to know, I think through my post-secondary degrees, I did all three with three kids at home.

MM: Amazing.

YPP: Yeah, yeah. So, you learn how to multitask. But I also knew that there was a passion around learning more about what it meant to be Métis, and I shared a personal story with you

around my own upbringing as a Métis child, and that was not an easy upbringing. And so, you know, I needed to understand why my own family home held so many, oh, gosh, conflicting emotions. I think is what I saw. I saw pride in being Métis. And then being told outside of the family home to be quiet about that. And so those strongly mixed messages I had to make sense of. And so, I got back to school to earn a four-year Bachelor of Education. That was my plan. I had three kids. I had to get in, get out. And but I also knew enough to… So for me, spirituality is my preference. And so, I come from a Catholic background, but I found much more power and solace in Indigenous spirituality. So yeah, so I pray daily. I ask for guidance in what I do, and that Creator directs me. And so, I often don't know what's going to happen, right? And so, I give myself to that path to Creator, to direct or bring in synergies that are often unexpected. And, I prayed during the very first days of my return to school, I was a mature student with kids all over the city. And I thought to myself, "What am I doing?" I had a really lucrative oil and gas job downtown, Calgary was making really good money, and they were moving me into a futures trading position, and I just decided that I couldn't stand the racism.

MM: Mmmm

YPP: And because people in southern Alberta mistake me for other ethnicities, so I've been asked if I'm Italian, you know, even. Oh gosh, Hawaiian.

MM: Goodness.

YPP: Yeah, just really different ethnicities. It's only when you're up in northern Alberta, they recognize you, right? They'll they're like you are they'll look at me and say, "Are you?" And I'll say, "Yes." Or if I'm in a place like Winnipeg.

MM: Yes (laughter of MM and YPP).
YPP: Yes. I mean, yeah, I get the smile and the nod of the head. Like yes, I'm home. But here in Calgary, not so much. Not so much. And so, working downtown, corporate Calgary, oil and gas… people would disclose these racist remarks to me, not knowing I was Métis, I wasn't sort of out… so visibly out then. And then they would tell me these horrible little Indian jokes. And I finally got to the point where I, I, I got a little more brave and I started saying things like, "Is now a good time to tell you I'm Métis?" Like, after this really horrible off color racist joke and the reactions I get right, like, yeah. So, I thought to myself they were trying to entice me back with, you know, bigger, brighter jobs and I just decided, no, I think I need to go back to school. I need to go back to school. So yeah, so that kind of started the journey off in 1996. And yeah, I thought nice tight four-year bachelor of ed. But the way I go, because I knew that I loved teaching and that didn't work out. So, because I had three kids, I think I as many as three classes. That's all I could juggle. And when Mount Royal moved the program into a full-time program, I just couldn't do it. And so, I ended up eventually earning a Bachelor of Arts with a major in Canadian Studies, which in all truth, was actually Indigenous Studies. But I couldn't declare that here at the time with a Minor in Arts Education.

MM: Okay, okay.

YPP: So, I did a very spiraling path. (Laughter). To get in my, to earn my first degree. And because I did well in the program, they actually and by they, I mean the provost of the University of Calgary invited me to join graduate studies about my Aboriginal grads. So, I'd earned a lot of awards and honors. And he said, “I think this is the path for you.” I'd already been accepted into the after degree, a Master of Teaching, because again, my passion was still for teaching. But again, I had prayed and this fellow I'd never met before, second in command right at the University of Calgary, had listened to the story of my journey through school. So, my family, my three, now older children, at my graduation and had asked me some really big questions. You know, “What do you believe your role is as an educator?” And I said, you know, “To change the minds of people around Indigenous peoples, but especially those around the world, how people think about the Métis.” And so, he suggested actually strongly encouraged me to the point of phoning the Dean of Communication Culture at the time and insisting that I be let into the graduate program. So, I came in as what I call a “rogue student”. So, I didn't go through the normal process of applying, vetting, etc., etc., but rather had the door opened by an ally. So, my reception was chilly. Into the graduate program over at the Faculty of Arts. They really felt that I was being given special treatment and indeed, you know, I was. But that led me into my master’s in communications. I'd never even taken a communications class in my undergraduate degree. And so again, I was thrust into really like, unfamiliar territory. And so, yeah, I was again on the steep uphill curve encountering material, had zero relevance for what I wanted to do with my life, but I continued to pray that I'd be given a path forward; were shown the path forward. So, in that graduate program, I was attending a talk by a speaker on communications development, and they were talking about the ways in which participatory action research could open up pathways for marginalized communities. That was the language of the time. And to help empower them into realizing their needs, their interests. That kind of clicked for me.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: And I thought, “Oh, okay, maybe there is a place for me, right?” As often happens, I can't recall if it was the same session or not, but there was a person sitting beside me and they'd heard about the type of work that I wanted to do because I was insistent that I wanted to work with Indigenous communities. At the time, I'd not narrowed it to Métis, and they knew about my love of technology. How could we use that as a tool of decolonizing? And so, they passed me over Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s book.

MM: Love it (laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: It became; it was my Bible.

MM: Yeah, correct (Laughter). Correct.

YPP: That, that I clung onto! (Laughter of MM and YPP).

MM: And for folks listening to this is Decolonizing Methodologies. (Laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: Oh yeah, I was. Like, it's like somebody had passed me a lifebuoy.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: When I was drowning. I was, like, awash in this sea of Euro-communications theories and ideas that made, you know, they were beautiful ideas, but not for me. And yeah, it was just this lifebuoy that was thrown to me. And so, yeah, thankfully, thankfully, I opened that page or the first page of that book and then devoured it. It's what I call one of my most well-loved books. It's marked up.

MM: Yup. (Laughter)

YPP: There's comments, there's tags, pages are turned over. That's a well-loved book. (Laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: And so, yeah. All in answer to what it is to be Métis, what you're doing right is you're navigating all the time, navigating, you know, that you're in terrain that you've never entered before, but you also trust that there will be a way forward. And so even though I could tell you some of the challenges I faced as a Métis student back in the day, that was in the early 2000s, there were incidents of racism and an exploitative supervisor that I then had to try to get rid of. So, and I had to fight those battles largely on my own. As the only Métis student, who was encountering a landslide of material that was irrelevant to me. When I think about those things that made my journey possible, I think about Heather Devine and her winks at me during my candidacy exams to let me know that what I was coming up with was appropriate, not only to that, but it was to her. It was a Métis response. And the other moments being passed a book at a speaker session that said, "You might want to read this," and allies. Like. Ron Bond, who was the provost at the time. Saying, "I think you might want to think about graduate studies."

So those moments, those big moments of alliance, of solidarity, of spiritual guidance set me forward, I think, on a path where I was able to, in my Ph.D. studies, I had no intent to say to move on to a PhD in program. So, as a Métis woman, I was raised with the highest expectation, I get to Grade 12. So, high school graduation was the bar that was set in my family home. And even earning an undergraduate degree was largely unheard of in my extended family. I have, last count over 200 cousins and so my family say, "Aren't you done yet? Are you done yet?" And my family would say, Unfortunately, my mum, because I lost my dad. Actually, he passed away when I was 26. But my mum, who's in her mid-eighties now, when I was in the graduate program, she would say, "Are you done yet? Why don't you get a real job?" And so right that because our people are entry into the academy is quite recent. I was in an area that was unknown

to not only my family, but I would say the wider community. There were pathbreakers. Certainly, you know, I clung on to Halfbreed by Maria Campbell, but I had the pleasure of seeing Maria Campbell speak and actually getting to sit beside her on the plane out to the WIPCE Conference.

MM: Perfect, that's great (laughter).

YPP: You know, she wanted to see the digital stories from Fishing Lake.

MM: Oh wow, fabulous.

YPP: Right. So that was just this, again, amazing moment that you could have never planned or hoped for. But yeah, there were all these sorts of moments of what it means or what does it mean to be Métis. So, to me, it's kind of like putting this beautiful faith into the universe with hard work, which is right one of our Métis values.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: And determination, and most importantly, I think, integrity and who we are as people.

MM: Mmmmmm.

YPP: Believing of the good of our people and that it can be hard, cause a lot of our people are still in a place of being colonized. And you also have to understand that I know when I was doing my work up in Fishing Lake in the settlement community, I had just read Frantz Fanon, thankfully, and that was, you that's a Martinique psychologist who was commenting on internalized oppression.

MM: Mmmmm.

YPP: Right? And so that book from a global scholar gave me insights and understandings and empathy for what I was witnessing as hurt in the community, and it allowed me, I think, to work in a good way in the community because I brought a greater understanding to my role, right? I was there to help the community, not judge them. So, what does it mean to be Métis? It means all these things. It means being open to criticism. It means being courageous enough to be creative. It means being vulnerable. It means being kind. It means so many things. I think that are hard to articulate. And working within a Métis context, to me, is such an honour and such a privilege, because what it means is that I get to share what I've learned with our fellow Métis. And yes. (laughter of MM). You know, I because I do pray.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: I think Creator has a plan, and I try to live life without regret. And so, oftentimes I enter into these spaces, or I enter into projects with really no idea what's going to happen. And I actually think that's kind of cool. I actually, I love that. It sparks that curiosity, but it's also it's excitement, and I think that's remnants of our Métis-ness, right? We were jumping into canoes,

heading off down the river way, not knowing what was around the corner. And so, there's something in that, a that unknowingness, I think, that has potential, that has a beautiful way that could happen. The potential is there. And I think that's what I operated in terms of being a creative individual. I mean, I've got slammed many, many times, right? You go in and you hope for the best and you serve with the best intentions, but sometimes the things don't as you hoped they would. And that's okay.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: That's okay. We always learn. And so, I think that's what just being Métis means, it means being true to who I am.

MM: Aww, oh that's beautiful. Maarsii.

YPP: Thank you.

MM: Because within your sharing too, you actually touched on so many connected questions. I also do have for you where it is, because I know that you're also a teacher educator,
And you support teachers first handedly, which is really the basis of my research too, which Fabulous (laughter of MM and YPP). So, with this beautiful connection here too, I was curious about, you know, the courses that you teach, the ones that you do. But then also in what ways do you also infuse your Michif identity within it?

YPP: Oh, Madelaine, you're asking such good questions (laughter of YPP and MM). Okay, here we go in another storytelling. So yeah, so my introduction and sort of my journey into both secondary and sort of, you know, relying on Creator to show me the path forward and having these moments of, of sort of affirming, I think, where I should be in life, all have led to my current role as a teacher educator.

And we shared in our pre-conversation, you know, after I'd earned my Ph.D. back in 2011, I'd gone out looking for different tenure-track positions across the country. I was told I was the wrong kind of Indian. That's basically what it boiled down to. And that really, other than Brenda Macdougall's role as a Métis Studies chair, there wasn't much out there for a Métis scholar. And so, I took on several sessional positions because I retained my love of teaching throughout all of the different paths that I took in my degree programs. The parchments on my wall do not indicate, I don't think, what I kept close. To me, that was that passionate love for teaching and, you know, knowing now what. What all of these different paths were meant to lead me to when I'd taken out after being denied several positions at universities. Largely, I would say because of my Métis identity, I had gone into the Rupertsland offices here in Calgary and had said, I need a job.

And so, I shared with you the story of them not quite sure of what to do with a Métis person who held a PhD. I had headed out the door and the, at the time, had stopped me literally heading out the door and had said, "Yvonne, wait, there's a job that's just come up as the associate director of Métis education." And so, I had been pulled in, back into the world of education, and this to me was a dream job, an absolute dream job. The one, I would say drawback, was that it was based in Edmonton. And so, I've been a long-time resident and raised my three now adult children here in Calgary. And so, my husband, I've been married for 40 years this July, so moving to Edmonton was another disruption. But I kept thinking, okay, I pray. And this is what I'm supposed to do

though, okay, this is the next thing to motivate them. And so, I had the great honour of meeting for the first time. Elizabeth LeTendre from the Edmonton area. I rented a room from her and was mentored by this beautiful, wise Elder for a year, and then I worked in that position as Associate Director of Métis Education. I was the only person in Métis education for the entire province of Alberta. In the year 2012 to 2013.

MM: Wow.

YPP: So, one person for the entire province.

MM: Wow.

YPP: So, and I did the trek from Calgary to Edmonton on a weekly basis. So, Madelaine is shaking her head because she understands what the road from Edmonton to Calgary is like and how life-threatening that trip can be with our changing weather here in the prairies. And I was also renting a room in someone else's place. So as much as I love honoured Betty, I was also in her room in her space and keenly aware of that as a mother and a wife, all to say. One day I gained so much knowledge, right? I just I want to honour that tenure at the Métis Nation of Alberta, through Rupertsland. I was mentored by Betty, the CEO at the time. Lord Gladue was actually from his family, was from Fishing Lake Métis Settlement. So, there were connections there. I spoke a lot about how we needed to come together as on-settlement and off-settlement as Métis within the province of Alberta and heal the division that a colonial government really, I think has deliberately placed upon us. Because I've always challenged someone to try to define me. Am I on-settlement Métis or am I off-settlement Métis?

MM: Mmhmm.

YPP: And so, yeah, so that role had really pushed me further into not only Métis politics, but I also started to understand the structures of the power dynamics of the Government of Alberta and also thankfully more and more into education. And so, I was working my mandate not only was the province of Alberta, but it spanned from birth to death. So, I was responsible for K-12, early childhood, adult lifelong learning... Just untenable, really. And there was no stable funding, core funding for that role. So, in 2013, the Werklund School of Education had received a $25 million gift from David Werklund, and a cohort of five Indigenous scholars was being recruited to the University of Calgary in Education. And so, I was asked to put my application in. I had graduated with a PhD in communications, a minor in education. And so, I didn't think that I fit the role.

MM: Mmmhmm.

YPP: But again, I relied on the faith of people who were observing what I was doing more so than what I could see.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: And so, the faculty from Werklund said, “You do adult education.” And in my role at Rupertsland, I was also deeply responsible for K-12 and early childhood. I mean, as much as I could. And so, I applied for the job. I got it. And the opportunity to move back to Calgary to my home was one of the deciding factors for sure. I did cry for four days straight. I'm not a crier, but when I had to leave, Betty’s home. And when I had to leave the Métis community work, I wept for four days and I could not stop crying, to the point that I actually hesitated on accepting the

position that I'd been offered at Werklund, to the 11th hour. They called and they said, “Are you taking the position or not?” And I agreed, knowing that practically speaking, I had to be back in Calgary.

One of the conditions that I set out for Werklund is that I wanted to remain committed to the work of supporting Métis education. And so, when you ask about being a teacher educator, that story tells you the level of commitment that I bring to my role here at Werklund and maybe it's not as important for Werklund as it was for me, I needed to articulate that. I would only take the position if the Métis side of me would not be taking over.

MM: Aw.

YPP: And so, they said, “Absolutely, Yvonne. And that's why we're hiring you.” And when they said that that cemented the deal for me, I was like, “Okay, I'm in.” And took up the role. What do I bring to my role as a Métis person, to the role as a teacher educator? I bring the Métis that is me into that classroom, and I consider my role as a teacher educator to bring my authentic self. What I've learned about who I am into that classroom space. And I, I consider being a teacher and the classroom as a sacred space. We're sharing truths, I think, as Indigenous educators, but more specifically now that I'm working more in in the local Métis, I'm opening up hearts. I'm really, I often describe it as holding the beating heart of the students in my hand. That's what it feels like because you're teaching them hard, hard truths. You know that you're breaking open ideas of who they think they are. And it's the very… very. It's a privilege, but it's also a huge responsibility.

What do I teach while I teach? I was hired back in 2013 to teach the mandatory Indigenous education course. So, Werklund was the first across Canada to mandate mandatory Indigenous education as part of its teacher training and the hiring of the five of us five Indigenous scholars was meant so that we could support Dr. Jackie Ottmann was the sole Indigenous scholar here at the time, so we came in as a cohort to support not only her, but the vision of Werklund to do this in a good way. And so, we designed we created the, what we call 530, Education 530. And as a collaborative, a collective endeavour. So, I really love that we insist on our Indigenous principles and values as absolutely requisite to what we're doing here in this teacher training program. And it's been tough, I can tell you it's been really tough. So, we have competing voices at the table, right? We have Métis voices. We have First Nations voices. We have First Nations from across the country. We're in Blackfoot territory. We're navigating all of that. While designing course outlines and learning objectives and trying to be respectful and inclusive of all voices and perspectives. So, that's one of the courses. And so, as you know, one of the few remaining of the original cohort remaining here at Werklund, I sat at the table where we were hammering out readings and learning tasks and did all of those good things that comprise good pedagogy.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: I know who I am. And I was insistent on inclusion of Métis while also being respectful that we're on Blackfoot territory, while also understanding that folks arrive with loyalties to certain scholars and certain community members. So, it's a really complex navigation to come up with that course outlined that is respectful and inclusive. So, what I can say to you is that honestly its first iteration was, and my fellow scholar here at the Werklund school, Aubrey Hanson, a Métis woman and I we wrote about this. So, one of our articles is that first iteration was heavy with good intentions, and by heavy, I mean way too many readings, way too many readings. So that's often what happens when you're new scholars, right? You get over enthusiastic. So, it can you throw everything at your course students (laughter of MM and YPP).

MM: Soon-to-be teachers!

YPP: Right? But what I've learned. With a lot of humility and a lot of like asking students, like, is this working for you? Cause that's not good pedagogy. So, what happens, and I've also learned this from being a 15-year student myself.

MM: Mmmhmmm.

YPP: And the best courses that I took were the ones that considered you.

MM: Mmm.

YPP: As a human being, as a person with certain limitations, certain capacities. And that arrived first and then the learning could happen once there was space for humanity. Right? And for we can actually achieve as humans. And so, I bring that into my teacher education courses. And so, I've taught diversity and learning. I've taught professional development and lifelong learning. I'm being recruited now to to teach in the International Indigenous Studies Program. So, I created and design and delivered the first ever Métis Matters course.

MM: Beautiful.

YPP: In January 2024, which is usually the response I get. Right. "Beautiful. Wonderful." And I'm like, "No, it's disgusting." It's 2020. Well, it was 2024.

MM: Yeah, should have been sooner.

YPP: Umm, Yeah. So anyways, did have the privilege of being asked to design and create that and my goodness, that was, that was a lot of work. But, such an honour.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: And so, I get to teach it again this upcoming fall. I think I'm… I'm so lucky, really. Right? I get to teach Métis Matters, and I get to design it, and I get to, like, call community and to help me teach it. And because I know my voice alone is not enough. So, when you talk about these teacher education courses, to me, it's so important that I bring my authentic self into that classroom. And they have to understand, you know, it's not just celebratory, it's not just residential schools. It's not just injustices. It's not just our strength and resilience. It's all of that, like packed together.

And so, you know, teaching the, the wider Indigenous education course is challenging because you have a lot to cover. We do work hard to make sure that the Métis have a voice in there. And some of the creative work that I've done throughout the years with my beloved colleague and friend, Billie Joe Grant. So, we've done Métis Voices, Métis Memories, but we make sure that the students are introduced to that work because that's rich work that they can take up right away. They're open access, they're freely available online. They come complete with teaching resources, like everything's there. I teach from who I am, and so I make sure that I'm respectful and inclusive and honoring that we are on Blackfoot territory. I cannot gloss that over because it's an integral part of these lands. But we're also talking about the relationships between the different groups who are local to this area, but also inclusive, right? Of that wider urban Indigenous community.

MM: Right.

YPP: So, it's tricky teaching. It's eight weeks in total. We have to cram a lot into that. So, we've taken away a ton of the readings and really try to give our students more experiences. Yeah.

MM: Lovely.

YPP: Yeah. So thankfully that core group of scholars, even though its shifted and we've sort of changed out groups, Dustin Louis, one of my former colleagues who's Carrier from B.C, who's now working at the University of British Columbia, when he, I and Aubrey were working together, I believe Jackie was still with us at the time. We came up with witnessing to replace one of our standard essays because we thought, “Why are we relying on Western approaches to evaluation of our of our students learning when we're in Indigenous space, we should be taking up Indigenizing principles and practices.” So, we went to Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s for 25 Decolonizing Projects, and we brought that into pedagogy.

MM: Mmm.

YPP: And so, witnessing became a core learning task in our mandatory Indigenous education course. And our students have reported back that they find this to be transformative. So, they're looking at each of their place on a weekly basis in the role of a witness. And we teach them deep listening. We teach them how different nations approach witnessing because it arrives in different forms across these lands, and we have them engaged in Indigenous practices throughout the term. And it culminates with a presentation of their journey of learning throughout the term, but also a tangible artifact of their learning. And so, they have to work as a collective. So, we're

sneaking in all these sorts of ways of getting our students to understand Indigenous practices firsthand. Yeah, I'm giving you these huge, long responses, but they're all part of my understandings…

MM: Yes.
YPP: Of what it means to be Métis

MM: What's really beautiful about it too, is the that the questions that I actually pre-created are interconnecting with each other, too. So, I just wanted to honor that as well. So, you're also answering other questions that I had for you, which is really, I think speaks for itself. (Laughter of YPP and MM). When you research among Michif (more laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: So, the weave is getting tighter (more laughter)!

MM: That's right!

YPP: The weave is getting tighter…

YPP: Yeah, and I think… Madelaine, too. I haven't looked at your questions because I wanted to arrive just with who I am, but I do try to give responses that give the person that I'm having a conversation with, sort of insights into what they need. So, we talked about that, and that's what I've learned as a teacher, educator. You know, I bring the arts into my classroom because I believe in the power of the arts. I believe they allow this beautiful, powerful entry point into what is difficult learning. And so, we're sitting in the office surrounded by art, because that's what fills my cup up. And so, I think that Métis side of me, I call myself a wannabe artist… I do have an arts education training (laughter of MM).

So, I am officially an arts educator. But you know, the sash in the background, is my, my daughter's painting. And so, when I took the job at Rupertsland and I was feeling plucked out, I guess, of my Calgary home, I went to my daughter and she's a mental health nurse now. And I said to her, "You know, I would just love…" because she was, she is an artist, a real artist. And I said, "I need something to take up to Edmonton with me." And she said, "Okay, well, what do you want?" And I said, "Well, I'm going to be working with the Métis Nation. So, something Métis." And she said, "Okay, I'm fine. I got it" (MM laughter).

YPP: And she just closed her bedroom door. And I was like, "Okay." An hour later, she came out and she had produced the tri-panels seen behind us here, and it's a Métis sash. She was quite young. I think she was finishing her nursing degree at the time, and she said, "Mom. She said, I've done them in three panels because like the Métis people they need to be together to be unified, to represent the whole." I didn't get that gift, but I did, I think, get the gift of an educator's heart. The panel forms the background of the Métis memories of Residential Schools,

the mural mosaic that, Billie Joe and I and Elder Angie Crerar from Grand Prairie, Judy Daniels, who wrote Métis Memories of Residential Schools. Yeah, it forms the, the visual for that.

MM: It's really meaningful that your daughter was the one to also do this, as well. I think [it's] more connective to family relations, to kinship in this direct way, but also the generational impacts of feeling proud and feeling good about yourself. And this is what's reflected when I look at that. It's really beautiful.

YPP: Thank you for that. Thank you. That means a lot to me because I see it, and I see a very talented young woman (laughter of MM and YPP).

MM: Me too (laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: Who I'm insanely jealous of as well, because this happened in one hour.

MM: Wow, wow! (Laughter of MM)

YPP: She walked out, and I was like, no, really? No. And she's like "Well, it's pretty rough, mom. But here it is."

MM: It's brilliant, it's beautiful. And that's what – is this what the Métis sash means to you, then too? In this beautiful way?

YPP: Yeah, she turned me, we talked about in our pre-conversation. I've always, because I did marry an English-Scottish fella, I've always allowed my kids the choice of whether they want to side with their Métis-ness or not. And you know, I carry on. Being who I am.

They're listening. They're listening when you don't even know they're watching, when you don't even know. And I think I bring that side of myself too. I am a mother of three now-grown children and a new Kokum. You know, you just you try to be the best person that you can be in this world. I try to live without regret. But when you've got reflections, when you've got observations from people about what you're doing, and I'm not doing it to earn praise or to get accolades, but I'm doing it because I think I've got a purpose. I think that. I'm here to do something. And I do believe that the ancestors guide the work that, that I do, that you do, that we do. And I love that we're moving back to 'we.' And I think like that insidious, individualistic orientation of the colonizers has really infected our communities. And so, I know I've veered off the, the programs that I teach, but I try to bring that, that authentic self into my teaching. And I'm very upfront with my students. I talk about the difficulties right, of navigating community work, of navigating family dynamics and all of those. I think of the many outcomes of a colonial past in our communities, I don't gloss any of that over. I let them know that I never blame the community, but I understand it, right? And so, I work for the good of the people. I guess to fully answer that question, I cannot forget that I designed to created, along with a group of brilliant people, because I'm smart enough to know I don't know everything (laughter of MM and YPP).

MM: Humble (laughter of MM).
YPP: Right?

MM: (laughter)

YPP: I bring in the best. And so, I worked with these beautiful scholars. So, Solange Lalonde who does curriculum development. She's just this beautiful educator, right? But I worked with Aubrey Hanson, who brings the soul and the love for the books into the space. And so, I worked with ally Patricia Danyluk, like two doors down from me here in these offices as the voice of the ally. And we designed this mostly Solange and I, actually arguing, debating like just having these really big conversations around what reconciliation - a program, a graduate program designed to reconciliation could look like.

MM: Beautiful. Because this connects to my next question, if you don't mind me, because this is perfect. (Laughter).

YPP: Absolutely. (Laughter of MM). Yeah, because I should let you ask your questions.

MM: So, then this connects to what does truth before reconciliation education research mean to you and where do you see its place in teacher education?

YPP: Oh, my goodness. Yeah. You're asking such big questions. Okay, I'll try to. Be more concise, I'll try to be more concise.

MM: But it's all connected (laughter)!

YPP: Right, right? So, truth before reconciliation. So, yeah, we've got this wave of new teachers, I'd like to say here in Alberta, but I think they're they've probably spread their wings and flown beyond, since 2013, who've entered the educational realm with a new understanding of Indigenous perspectives, at least an awareness. Reconciliation has always been at the heart of that teaching, even before it was articulated right with the TRC, with the Calls to Action in 2015. So, we've been teaching truths. Hell, we've been teaching those truths since the sixties and seventies. Right? Glance at my bookshelf behind you see Howard Adams, I see Maria Campbell Emma Larocque like these beautiful voices that we're trying to relay the truths. In 2015, I think ears were finally perking up and saying. "Oh. I didn't know. I need to learn." If we're lucky, that last phrase comes in. So, truth before reconciliation absolutely was happening for a long, long time. The TRC's work has really brought forward, I think, to a national audience through the stories of the survivors and its sharp focus in on the residential schools as something of monumental importance.

For Métis people, reconciliation is more than residential schools. And so, that history for us. Yes, it includes residential schools sporadically, haphazardly. Yes, we were part of it. But no, sometimes we weren't. Sometimes like my mom, she was an industrial school, ran away after two days. Like there's our story is much more complex, much more all-encompassing. So, for me, truths and reconciliation. I designed a graduate program with these wonderful scholars with the truths at the beginning. So, we teach theoretically about that. But I also teach that

reconciliation is much more than residential schools, much more than residential schools. And even though we must honour, must see the suffering that Indigenous lives, beautiful, innocent children were subject to, we also have to cast that look broadly.

And I think, you know, when we designed that graduate program, we really - it's called Indigenous Education: A Call to Action. And so, we designed it to respond to the TRC calls, but within that program, so we teach it for ten days in the summer. So, two of the four certificate courses are taught in the summer. I had the good sense when I was designing it, not only to work with people like Solange, Aubrey, and Patricia Danyluk, but I also was called in to the offices upstairs by the leadership here at Werklund. And they said, "Yvonne, that if you had an ideal classroom to teach your program, what would it look like?" And I would - I said, "I would have Elders beside me from 9 to 5 every day." They said, "Okay, we're going to see what we can do to make that happen." And I said, "Really?" And so, I don't think they're compensated. The Elders are not compensated as they should be, but at least we have them. And what the different Elders and Betty has been an enduring presence in that program has told me, "It's not about the money, Yvonne, it's about what you're doing with this program." So, we're teaching in the program how to be together in a good way, how to live together to understand one another. And throughout years I've had half Indigenous, half non-Indigenous students, which has been miraculous, really. And in that space, from being together morning and afternoon, we are with Elders. And so, it's this space where deliberately, because of Solange and I hammered out, you know, what would this course look like? What if you could have anything you wanted? What would it look like? We've got land-based learning, we've got ceremony, we've got arts galore, we teach the heavy theoretical material in the morning and then the afternoon. The art space.

MM: That is so smart. So smart, because that's when your brain is ready to learn. And then you got more of that creative outlet in the afternoon even that in of itself is fabulous.

YPP: Right? So, there's so, we're looking at that, right? How do we hold these tensions together? Right. They oppose, but they also draw together.

MM: That's right.

YPP: And so, yes, cognitively we do the heavy stuff and then we bring in the lighter material. Well, can be lighter material into the afternoon. We also are introducing emotionally heavy topics in the morning. And we balance that with playful, joyful laughter, creativity, imagination... So, there's also that component, the emotional component.

MM: It's the balance.

YPP: Yeah. So, there is, right? So, there's different things that we do within the program that are very, very intentional. We know at the beginning of week two because it's a ten-day, two-week program that's very intense. It's usually the Monday of the second week; we go spend a day out in Siksika. And so, we're with community and so we to Blackfoot Crossing Historical Park in the

morning. We get to enjoy, and you know, when we're lucky, we're with the folks from there. The Siksika, I had one year, I think four or five, Siksika students, so they led the day, it was great.

MM: That's fabulous.

YPP: Right? (Laughter of MM)

YPP: But then the afternoon. So now you're starting to see a flip. So, the afternoon we go to the Old Sun Community College, and we spend an afternoon in a former residential school, now turned into a First Nations community college. And so, they're experiencing the, the heaviness of a former residential school, what the walls contain, the space contains but also seeing the beautiful empowerment of the people who have reclaimed the building as their own, and they're using it as an educational space. What we see in that second week is that the two separate realms start to get entangled, right? So, start to think about your Métis sash and what we're doing now is interweaving. And so, what we do in that second week is we get our students to exercise their creativity and their imagination. We're really, really bad at that because we've been subject to the typical way of teaching. And so, I ask students to take academic articles and to perform those without words.

MM: That is very interesting.

YPP: Very hard.

MM: Wow.

YPP: And that look, that you're giving me is what my students do. They - they look like, what… what?

MM: I'm very intrigued by that, though. What that looks like pedagogically. That is neat. (Laughter of MM).

YPP: It's interesting, right? So, I say. Without words, but it's without the usual presentation of words. Okay. So, for instance, because you need an example, right?

MM: Yes. (Laughter of MM)

YPP: So, we look at decolonizing as our theoretical framework and sort of we're looking at ways in which different Indigenous scholars, we always privilege Indigenous scholars in this graduate program. And so, Warren LeClaire's work, we bring in a ton of artists as well as Dwayne Donald's work. But what we're asking our students to do is to take the ideas and to create or imagine them into a new form. So, we're taking up transformative practice in a concrete way. And so, throughout the years, students have come up with, I think, one example that just really will always be in my memory, is we were teaching at the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. And so, I assigned a group of students to an article and then they have to collaborate together, do a summary of notes, but then envision a creative way of presenting that material to their peers. And what this one group did, they just happened to have a talented pianist as part of

their group of five. And so, they wrote up a decolonizing ditty based on the academic articles. So, they took a refrain from the article, and they built a song around it all in the space of 30 to 40 minutes. So, they haul this grand piano out from the gallery at the Taylor Institute. They asked if they could put it in the middle of the like the huge hallway at the Institute for Teaching Learning. They come up with this little catchy rhythm and they built choruses. I think that it was only two in that space of time. But they had a sing-along along the basic theoretical constructs that form the foundation for that particular academic article by singing it and performing it for us.

MM: Wow.

MM: Yvonne as a Michif Scholar, what kinds of philosophies, practices and pedagogies are you teaching to your students as pre-service teachers? And with this, what are key takeaways you hope they keep from your courses?

YPP: Oh, okay. You've got such a good a robust set of questions that'll just get my mind spinning right away. You know, I think within my own teaching practices, I really, I work from a relational model. And so, throughout the years, you know, we, we I think has as really dedicated, devoted educators, we're, we are so keen on delivering so much content, right? We're like, oh, but they have to read this, and they have to understand this. But what I've come to understand, and I think alluded to this or probably extended it to previous answers, but oftentimes we come to our teaching with too many good intentions and those intentions arrive in the way of, you know, reading heavy course outlines, you know, where we're trying to throw everything at our students. And what I've really come to understand is that we need to pull back from that content and really concentrate on the individual learner. So, what is it that the learner is bringing into our learning space? What is it that I can do to help facilitate their learning, and how can we develop trust in each other? So that sits at the forefront of my teaching now.

So yes, we have a ton of content that we've got favourite ideas and concepts that we really want our students to grab on to and to be able to take into their teaching practices. You know, I referred to in some of my earlier responses about how some of my readings brought me refuge and a sense of safety within my own community work when I was witnessing some things that were really concerning. So yes, we still do that, but we also balance that against the needs of our students, and I know, you know, that's kind of a, a teacherly thing to do. We're always like, yeah, student-centered learning. But this is there are some tactics that I do with my teaching that really try to establish that sense of trust with my students. I know that they come in to say so I'll talk about the undergraduate course, what we call it, Education 530, the mandatory course introduced in 2013. And since I was part of that early group of educators who designed and created the course, you know, I think I might have shared this story of, you know, I was just recently hired at Werklund, and I was one of the five Indigenous scholars. And I remember being really, really excited. But also, super anxious about teaching this course.

So, I remember walking down the hallways, heading into our education classroom block, and there were clusters of students gathered around and sort of whispering to one another. I've come

to call this “hallway chatter.” And I could feel the energies as I walk through the hallways, and I could see that the students were up to something. And that's good. I actually think that's really good. I'd rather have students really engaged and really, you know, committed to their learning, even if it arrives in this form of resistance. And that indeed, that's, that's what I came to understand as I entered my classroom. So, I entered my classroom, gave the cheery, hopefully welcoming introduction of who I am and, you know, sort of just opened it up. And I said, you know, “Do you guys have any questions?” So, this was the first year that the Indigenous education course was mandated to our pre-service teachers.

I had about 35, possibly 40, I think 35 students that year. And I could just feel the tension in the room. And so, there was one. And I usually playact this when I talk about the resistance to the course in its initial delivery. So, there was one fella who was sort of seated amongst everybody else, and we were in a windowless classroom, you know, sort of so your energies are all sort of contained and sort of had himself all sprawled out, legs wide open, you know, the classic male power stance. He shot his hand up in the air and he said, “Why do I got to take this course?” Straight out of the gates. Clear language. And I thought to myself, okay, here we go, here we go.

So, in that moment, the teacher instincts came to the forefront. So, I thought, okay, this is the challenge, right? Because we'd heard as, as the Indigenous scholars, we'd heard about the resistance from students to the mandating of this course. And so, it was being opened up in my in my classroom. So, I thought, okay, I know all eyes are on me. I could see people shifting in their seats nervously. I could see them glancing at each other. And so, I thought, okay, this is this is where you, you step into the discomfort. You do this, lean into it, you step right into it. I moved across the room, and because that I knew it was a challenge to my own power. If you and I like to think of myself as holding power, but it would be a challenge to authority. And so, I moved myself closer to where he was, with a smile on my face, and I stepped right in between his legs.

MM: Haha! (More laughter).

YPP: And I got myself really close and stepped like, right into his face. And I very deliberately was doing that because the body language speaks as much as the voice, right? And so unbeknownst to this young man, I grew up with what are now like six-foot-two, six-foot-five mean-looking Métis brothers, right? I'm not afraid of men. And so, when I did that. His bodily reaction was like (Yvonne gestures to the person orienting themselves to focus).

MM: “Let me respect you now.”

YPP: So that was funny. And I said, “That's such a good question.”

MM: Yeah.

YPP: “Thank you for asking that.” And I said, “Let’s, let's talk about that.” And so, then I opened it up to the class for responses. So, it was it was this encounter with white male

privilege, power, right? And this assumed stance of superiority, right? It was all of these things in this young man. You know, I do at the same time that I know what power looks like. I understand how to confront it. I also don't want to lose the learner.

MM: That's right.

YPP: I never want to lose the learner. So, when I did that, when I stepped into, and literally stepped into his space, and you know, I got the bodily reaction, and then I got the - it was painfully slow, but I know how to wait. The responses from the other students in the class really started to open up a conversation around why this type of course, learning Indigenous perspectives was so important. So, in that moment, I think we started to create a sense of community and so that, you know, that moment will always remain in my mind. And of course, I ham it up when I playact it, and I usually get superintendents of schools to be the, the student. Right?

MM: Yeah.

YPP: Right? Because, right? But it's, I think, you know, when you talk about, you know, what practices do I bring into my teaching. I think about, you know, the way I was raised. You know, I think about the ways that our people navigated difficult spaces and how the Métis, and you know, I'm in the midst of writing this journal article right now for the Métis Futurities series. And I'm thinking about our role as not only cultural mediators, but we're in a space of building relations.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: Trusting with one another. And so that to me, in order to balance what I was feeling and seeing in the class… in my sacred space, I, for me, my, my classroom becomes a sacred space. And so that had to be navigated. That had to be really brought to the forefront right away because we could do all the, you know, the nice talk about safe spaces and all of that, but is it really a safe space and especially for we as Indigenous educators?

MM: Right.

YPP: Because who's at risk?

MM: Right.

YPP: So yeah, so in that opening, you know, we were able to have these really tough discussions without that discussion. And yes, you know, we have to do all of the normal first day kind of activities, introduce the course and you do all that kind of thing. I thought, nope. That is just not important as setting out this space, as a space opening of a space of leaning, as a space of trust and a space of support. And so, you know, at the end of the term, that young man came to me, and he said, "I just want to thank you." Yeah, he said, "I was tough on you." And he said, "You

were able to respond in a way that opened up my learning rather than shut it down." Now, that first year of our course, in 2013, there were a number of cohorts, other classes. So, we have a very large education program. So, there were several sections that had students boycotting the class.

MM: Wow.

YPP: Yeah, they refused to go. But I made it my goal to keep each and every student coming back for the learning. And I set that challenge to myself. And in most of the teaching that I do. That young man, in seeing him arrive in our classroom space every day after that, that to me signaled that I was doing things in a good way. Now, one of my other tactics is to always surprise my students. So, they, they come in with a preconceived notion of what we're going to be doing based on their experiences and other classes. And so, I have also done things to really break apart the anxiety that they bring to the classroom, to that this type of learning, and in very playful and intentional ways.

MM: Mmhmm.

YPP: One of the things I do with my classes is instead of going over the course outline, we play a of online jeopardy, right? So, I separate them into four groups, and it's usually just like this one, this one, this one, this one. Right.

MM: Right.

YPP: Based on the classroom. And I've set up like the themes within the online Jeopardy game, I have some, one of the students volunteer to play the Jeopardy music because it's just not the same without the music.

MM: Correct. (Laughter of MM and YPP).

YPP: And then and then we, I start teasing.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: Because what I'm trying to do is to make them excited and interested. I am not there to instill shame.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: I am not there to inflict guilt. I am there to open up their learning. And so, I warned them. I said, "Okay…" in a teacherly way, I always explain to them what I'm doing. I said, "So my friends, this is a game, but it's also baseline assessment."

MM: Mmmm mhmm.

YPP: And then and I said, "So, I'm also introducing you a collective way to approach learning." And they're like, "What?" I said, "Because to me, it's not about your marks, it's how

much you're retaining, how much you're bringing into your future teaching practice that is important. And we do that best together."

MM: That's right.

YPP: You know, and I tease the hell out of them. I said, you know, "I know you're anxious. I know that some of you might have taken a class or two and think that you've got a good handle on this. We're about to test all of that, and we're doing it in a way that you are supporting one another." So, the groups have got to. So, it's not like regular Jeopardy, right? It's a lot of adaptation (laughter of MM). So, they choose the level they choose. Well, a category, that level. And then we give them whatever. I'm not very strict about the rules, so a couple of minutes somebody plays music, blah, blah, blah, and they get together, and they chat about what might be the right response, and then they throw out their response at the end of the music. And then I halt, and I say to the class, "Who thinks the response is right?"

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: So, by raise of hands, they indicate whether they think the groups got it right or not. And then I'll say, you know, "Who thinks it's something else?" Like, I just do it really casually. It's not formal. I will say, "Okay…" right? So, it's all about the anticipation. Then I reveal the answer. Now, it's really interesting to me because then. Right, because you as the teacher educator, are getting a sense of where your students are at. Not only that, but you're getting a sense of how they interact with one another. Is there a dominant voice? Is there a willingness to open up and learn from one another? Are they anxiously sitting there waiting to be judged. So that collective way of doing things is being introduced in a playful, gentle way, but they're also starting to understand their own peers. So, the game, even though introduce it in a very playful, joyful way. And I tease the hell out of it. Like I'm like, "You don't know what bannock is? Come on!" (Laughter of MM). So, it's really interesting to me because you see the clash of worldviews, because they're all about the points, they're all about being über competitive.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: They're all about, "Ouuuu, you know, can we steal that? Can we steal that?" And I'm like, "Actually, no. This is about the learning."

MM: Right.

YPP: So, I take their rules and I'm like. I'm saying, "No, this is about learning." So, it's not the classic Jeopardy game. I've adapted it to introduce that playful air and I have heard time and time again from students. "Wow, that was fun." "Thank you so much." "I thought I knew things, I don't." So, they walk out the door chattering happily and, and they have this sense of joy around their learning because what they've seen is that I'm not going to be the (noises of wah wah wah – mimicking the Charlie Brown teacher).

MM: (Laughter) Charlie Brown! Yeah… (more laughter).

YPP: Right? They can see that I'm there for them.

MM: Right.

YPP: I'm there to support their learning. And you know, in explaining that I'm teasing, I'm also introducing another attribute that is an integral part of our ways of being: humour. So, what I'm trying to do in all of that is sort of loosen up the learner so that they can open up to learning, because we know that with guilt, fear.

MM: Yeah anxiety.

YPP: All of these things, the learning does not occur as easily and as naturally as it could. And so, yeah, so that's one of my sort of go-to's because I find students just love it and then they can, when they come back to class next, they like, "What's she going to do today?" So yeah, so quite often. Quite often I'll go off my, you know, my lesson plans and I'll, I'll just reach out to my students and say, "What do you need from me today?"

MM: Mmmmm.

YPP: So yeah, so it's very much, I think that relational way of teaching and learning, it's not prescribed by the conventions and norms. So, what we typically do in our formal classrooms, but instead it, I hope, that these extra efforts instill curiosity, a passion for learning, you know, just an energetic way of engaging. But that relational way is very much what I do. And I, you know, I ask them to write me a letter at the beginning of the term. So, you know, stuff that they wouldn't divulge in class.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: But they might want to let me know about and what I've done is I take what they've shared with me into my teaching so that –

MM: Beautiful.

YPP: Right? So, that I'm aware that there's certain needs in the classroom. The reason they – you know that one student may show up late every day is the bus schedule doesn't arrive and they've got kids at home or whatever.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: It just makes me, I think, more accommodating. You know, as a woman that went back with three kids at home, I need to know that about my learners. I need to respect where they're at. I only hold sharing circles. Sorry for [my] dog. At the beginning, usually, and at the end of the term. I don't do it as a daily practice because I feel like it's, it's a ceremonial practice that

something that needs to be honored. And if it becomes every day, it becomes mundane. And I don't want that. All of that to say, Madelaine… I think the relational model sits at the forefront. However it arrives, it might arrive in a variety of different forms based on what I see in front of me as my students all adapt what I'm going to do to suit their needs. It's not about me.

MM: No. And that's it.

YPP: Right?

MM: That's it. Wow.

YPP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So, I've forgotten. Now, the second part of your question.

MM: What you hope they're taking away, but you've also shared aspects of that. They've gone to you, multiple times too since the first class to even share, “Hey, this was impactful to me. This was very meaningful to me.” So yeah, they really took that. They really took that and ran (laughter of MM).

YPP: Yeah, and to me it - it's an indication of the trust relationship that we've built with each other. And so, even though sometimes I won't hear from students for years, all of a sudden, I'll get this, this beautiful email that says, “I doubt if you remember me…” but you know, and then they'll talk about our class or what we did and how that has impacted what they do in the classroom. To me, that's, you know, more so than any silly you, or us, or I [course reviews]. I actually don't even look at those because to me the, the actual proof of good teaching is in those relationships.

MM: Mmmhmm.

YPP: Yeah. So, there's a ton of ways in which I think students, I hope they become empowered. So, it's this beautiful balance between humility around their learning and empowered to become aspiring allies. So, it's, it's, it's a very delicate balance, but it's, it's my objective. So, another thing I'll often say to my students is the students that worried me most are the ones that head out the door. And go, “I got this.”

MM: Mmmhmm.

YPP: Right? Those are the ones that really make me nervous. The ones that I really appreciate are the ones that come up to me and say, “Dr. Pratt, I'm scared.”

MM: Yeah.

YPP: “I've - I know I have got to do this, but I don't know how to.” Well, and then. They back up and they're like, “You showed us. But are we able to do this?” And I, you know, I reassure them right from the beginning of the term that that is that's the aim. You’re not going to learn everything possible in eight weeks. But what we do is we open the door to learning.

In a perfect world, I would love to reach out to previous learners from that, from the two 2013 cohorts moving forward to 2025 now, and to ask them what impact that the course had on them, knowing full well because this is a speech, so I call this my momma bear speech at the end of the term. I'm like, “So now, you know things. Now you know things that others will not know. And what we are doing now is asking you to move into a system and a structure that may not hold the same level of knowledge that you do. And what is going to happen as a new teacher is that you're going to enter staff rooms, lounges, spaces where you are going to want to put forward what you know in front of a group of veteran practicing teachers, principals, school superintendents who don't hold that same knowledge.” So, I said, “Be careful. Be careful with the ways in which you use that newfound knowledge.” Because I know I've got students that just get lit right up. Right? And they become so impassioned by what they're learning about the injustices that they want to go in fighting and that's not the way to do it.

I've also questioned whether that's been the right advice because we've got a system that's not moving forward. I think it's the right advice for those that are in their, you know, first, second years of teaching where they're just trying to get their feet under them and understand what it's all about. But after that, we ought to have some kind of way of supporting our pre-service. Well, they're not pre-service anymore, now they're practicing teachers.

MM: Right:

YPP: How do we support them to bring what they know? How do we help them to advance that.

MM: Right.

YPP: Within their own schools in their classes? I've always had that in my head. I've always thought would love to gather together my former students and to talk about like what, what are they experiencing now that they're in the schooling system? But the reality is, is that as an Indigenous scholar, you're stretched so thin that there just simply isn't enough of you to be able to do these really important things. So, you know, I do when I'm invited by one of my former students to come into their schools, I always do, but there needs to be more concerted effort, and they also need to feel that they're not alone. That they have a community of learners who've gone through the same experience that they have, and likely are struggling with the same things. Like, I've been involved in this curriculum review here in Alberta for since 2021, and those curricular outcomes are used as a weapon, right? They are unrelenting lists of outcomes. So, think about my comments about way too much content and how that doesn't work. But they are being mandated to teach to this curriculum. And so, yeah, when think about how it has impacted the learners that I've had my classes, I hope it's in a good way, but I would love to be able to support them more.

MM: Aw.

YPP: Yeah.

MM: Oh, that speaks to the beauty of you as well and your teaching spirit. It's just it's so clear to me at least, and I'm sure for, for the folks listening too, it's just you truly teach with your heart and your entirety of who you are as you are teaching your students. I would have been so happy if you were my teacher. In all honesty, I would have been so happy if you were my professor. Oh, my goodness.

YPP: Well, thank you. Yeah, I do. I teach heart forward. And that's tough.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: That's really tough. It takes a lot out of you. And, you know, Thank you for that beautiful honoring

MM: Due to that, how do you take care of yourself?

YPP: I don't think I do, Madelaine.

MM: Awww.

YPP: I don't think that I do. You heard my very noisy dog. That's one thing, because my kids are all adults with families of their own. And so, my dog Noki, very, very loud dog. We go for walks on Nose Hill and it's close by and I, I just go out and you know, whether I listen to an audiobook or whether I let nature envelop me or if I watch Noki do ridiculous things like chase coyotes... Terrifying, but… (laughter of MM) but you know that, I think that is my single form of being able to navigate a lot of the stresses. No, I've had major medical repercussions for my work and the stress of the work, and so I know that. And so, I have to I have to learn self-care. I'm not great at it. Admittedly, I share that with my educational leadership. I said, “You need to help me because I'm driven.” I see the vacuum, I see the void around the Métis, particularly. I'm a rights fighter, and so it takes its toll. There's no denying, but I do get joy out of teaching. I do. It fills my cup. It absolutely fills my cup. And, you know, just this past fall. So, I taught that mandatory Indigenous ed course and I was doing a clean-up right around holiday time. So, I was going through my teaching binder the students had slipped in a little thank you note and had each written their little note of gratitude for, for my teaching and, you know, I was just, it just became this moment of reciprocity of love and unexpected... Like right now I've got goose bumps because it just you know I was trying to model that for them like to come in and bring moments of joy to them and, and, and they did it to me.

MM: Yeah. Oh. they did!

YPP: So those kinds of things, right? They fill up your cup again. And so, throughout the years I worked closely with the Education Students' Association. So, there's a leadership group, right? And so, we've got this new cohort of education students, five hundred. And so, this small group of volunteers, they each August, usually they start reaching out and saying, we'd like to do something meaningful for September 30th. And so, this past year, I had worked alongside an Elder in my Call to Action graduate program in the summer, and we'd initiated Kokum Calls You Project. So, we used, yeah, the kokum scarves to symbolize the coming together of different cultures in support of one another. And so, with the blessing of Elder Wanda First Rider, we had the students in the graduate program. We gifted them each a Kokum scarf, and then they each individually came up with a Kokum Calls You to support dot dot dot, and then they put what they felt was important for other centers. We tied the scarves with the laminated posters underneath, and it became a campus awareness raising activity.

So, when I shared that with the Education Students Association folks, they were like, "We want to support that." And so, they, like I help guide them, but of their own initiative, they went out and bought a five-foot by eight foot, they were massive, but kokum scarves. And then with my guidance, they, they built, or they created an information poster about what to the kokum scarves symbolize, and they hung them around the education tower. And because I'm working in transdisciplinary, they also brought these beautiful scarves out to the social work faculties and the nursing faculty.

MM: Oh lovely.

YPP: So, they did this all of their own accord. And then on September 30th, we arranged an event where I had a panel of Elders at the front to share their stories. Yes, that's kind of the norm, right? But what I felt in my heart is that we needed to give back. We needed to do that in a very tangible, concrete way. And so, throughout the years, my students have engaged in these beautiful initiatives through the Calls to Action Program in the classrooms. And so, I invited those students to fill the space with their own endeavors, their own responses to the Calls to Action. And so, it was not just about gazing on the pain of the Elders, but it became this dialogue of reciprocity where the folks who are actively engaged in responding to the TRC calls are lifted up and are saying to the Elders, "We're not just coming to the event, we're actually out there doing things." Yeah, so the entire space was filled with all of these displays of the ways in which former students have, have really done their own responses to the TRC calls. And what I saw was oh - the joy in that space. It was just having a big Métis or family gathering. It was like noisy (laughter of MM) with floor. There was like food. There was like, it was just this joyful, beautiful space.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: And what we did, is we made sure that there was a balance. And we talked about that in our previous conversation about balancing the, the truths with the, the ways in which we

need to lift up the strength and the resilience of our people and also importantly, the work of allies.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: Yeah, we filled the space. It was just, there were artistic displays, there were books, there were a ton of different things that our students have done. So, I know that it became much more so the, the Elders spoke, I think, for maybe 10 minutes each. But then it became a matter of honouring those who are actually going out and making the changes.

MM: Right.

YPP: Yeah. So, there's different efforts, I think that I've tried to model, and you know, when I was working with the education students, they kind were relying on the, you know, the model of speaking at… no, no, this is going to be much more deliberate. So, when the Elders entered the building September 30th, they saw these gorgeous displays of Kokum scarves. So, Elder Wanda was one of the speakers, and she saw what we did in the summer with the tying the scarves on the trees exploded into this beautiful intentionality. And she also witnessed that room was at full capacity.

MM: Beautiful.

YPP: And there were competing events right around Calgary.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: But I think we had 137 or something like that, show up. And like I said, the kids on the floor eating, chatting, and hugging. And it was just (laughter of YPP), that to me is what I think when we talk about truth and reconciliation. Like we've got to move from that. The heaviness and yes, the realities. Yes, they must be taught. They must be known. But then how do we bridge forward.

MM: Right.

YPP: Yeah.

MM: And enter brilliance.

YPP: Right? And honor the courage of those who taking part in this work, because all of that fear is resulting in apathy. Right? Indifference. And we have to lift up people who are, who are doing the work. Who are taking it up despite all the obstacles, they are engaging in this work. So that honoring of what they're doing, I think is so very, very important.

MM: Absolutely. That's why I think like personally speaking, I think of my students actually as co-conspirators rather than as allies, because I want them in this with me. And they also have the responsibility and obligation as people who live in Canada, but also as Canadians to take this up alongside us. Right? So that's kind of the language I like to use. And I think it's so

fun doing that because they also feel very ignited to also take action, too. It's very fun when I use that language because my students are like, “Whoa, I've never heard that before. Let's yes, (laughter of MM) let's do this together.” They get excited.

YPP: They do. And I think that I love that language. Yeah, I've heard that. I often just call mine, aspiring allies. So, they're always reaching for it. Right? But yeah, I love the language. Anything that will ignite excitement and passion. In the work, I think it's really, really important. And again, that speaks to why we need to support them.

MM: That’s right.

YPP: That's our system because they're seeing the realities, right?

MM: Yes.

YPP: Yeah.

MM: And how much we need help (laughter).

YPP: Please! (Laughter of YPP and MM). Yes. Yeah.

MM: And I have two more questions for you.

YPP: Okay.

MM: You've already kind of answered this one, though, too, but I may as well ask. In what ways are your students being influenced by your course syllabus, including course readings, learning experiences, pedagogies and practices about Truth Before Reconciliation education and addressing settler colonialism in preparation to become in-service teachers?

YPP: I have shared many stories, and I think our truth and reconciliation through education is a nice sort of synopsis of some of the ways that students have taken what they've learned into the classroom. Now, if you're speaking about the 530 class, the other undergraduate course for pre-service, I've heard students say to me, you know, “We learned so much through that course. We're bringing the reading list to our staff meeting.” So, I'm like, “I don't know. If you're allowed to do that.” (Laughter of MM and YPP). So, but to me, that's, that's evidence, right, that they've found what they've learned through the course of importance and value.

I've also had those emails from students who are, makes me a little bit anxious, sometimes though, they'll be brand new to their teaching career and they'll reach out to me and say, “So Dr. Pratt, so now I'm Indigenous lead at my school.” I'm like, “Okay…” I quickly look up their essays and anyways…Yeah, but that's, that's a vacuum, right? It's pulling what may be vulnerable teachers into a system that's not quite ready.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: And so, so the impact you know, while I celebrate it, I'm also anxious because I know the system, I know the structure, I know what does. And, you know, you've got these beautifully impassioned, dedicated educators, co-conspirators who want to get in there and make their own changes. But the disillusionment is real.

MM: Mmmmm.

YPP: And the realities of what is possible and what is not is also very, very present. And so, yeah, so even my pre-service teachers, you know, that I had in the fall, they've already come to me and said, you know, they were in their practicum, and they were excited to bring in the Indigenous perspectives and they had partner teachers who said, “We’ll be doing none of that in this classroom.” It's a very I think it's the space of being a teacher educator, an Indigenous teacher educator is very complicated. It's very complex.

We're not only navigating the, the complexities within our own classroom. We're considering the, the ways in which our former students, now newly minted teachers, are entering a system. And so, we can't do this. And this is becoming more and more obvious to me. We cannot do this without allied leadership, scholars, and others who are maybe just in the initial stages of learning. Because we can't do it on our own. And I think as Michif, as Métis people, we have to honor that. I mean, we've fought so hard to be recognized as a unique nation, but at the same time, our kin include those non-Indigenous peoples. And so, it's this very tension-filled space of we are who we are we know that we fought for it, we've lost our lives over it. But we also have to be respectful of all of our relations. There's no easy answers. Like it's a very delicate balance and it requires a lot of discussion and negotiation and upfront honesty.

MM: Mmmmm.

YPP: And knowing where you stand. And, you know, because I'm so deeply engaged in the local Métis community right now. So, taking about four calls a day from Métis community members who want to be involved in the education system, but also understanding that, that they don't hold that educational training. So, they’re impassioned, they know that education could represent a way forward. But, you know, you're, you're delicately diplomatic.

MM: Yeah.

YPP: But we can't come in with a hammer.

MM. Right.

YPP: We can't come in fists swinging, even though we might feel that way. It's not a, it's not proactive. It doesn't it won't affect the that we want to see. And so, yeah, I know I'm right in the throes of that right now because I really am working to bridge Indigenous knowledge traditions into the academy. But we have to do it in a very thoughtful way.

MM: In a way, it almost is like politics that I know that as Michif, we're also very good at politics (laughter).

YPP: Indeed! (laughter of MM and YPP).

MM: I appreciate how you've also noted that as a delicate balance as well.

YPP: It, it requires a lot of diplomacy. I think, as educators because we're caught in the middle, right. And we know that we can't teach this material without, and I call it: extreme kindness. But we're also trying to bring in our community into educational spaces so that they feel comfortable and safe.

MM: Because it could be harmful.

YPP: Hugely, hugely. So yeah, it's really interesting. So yeah, it's you know, not only am I doing the work with pre-service teachers, but I'm doing it now in community with knowledge holders. I don't think you can just work with pre-service teachers, with our own community. And so that's why I'm applying for grants and holding these free education workshops in Calgary right now, because I can see what our people need, and I want to offer. I've also, I think I mentioned I completed the analysis of the 1990 Media Education Conference and hopefully it'll be released soon. But back in 1990, our people were asking for things that we still need today in 2025. And so…

MM: 35 years later.

YPP: Yeah, I want to bring all that I've learned throughout my years in, you know, be going back to school. I want to bring that to the community because I'm not going to be around forever. And it's, it's right it's up to them. And folks like yourself that are just, you know, bravely taking up this work. So how can we empower the next generation to go forward in an ethical way?

MM: Right.

YPP: And in a good way.

MM: And Yvonne, this beautifully connects to the last question that I have for you, but certainly technically not the last, because I'm sure I'm always got to reach out to you after this (laughter).

YPP: Good (laughter).

MM: But do you have any further thoughts you'd like to share with in-service Métis teachers who will be listening to this conversation and/or other folks who will be listening to this as well?

YPP: You know, that's again, such a gorgeous question. So, I'm in the throes of writing an article on my own involvement in the many voices that may make memories of residential schools my work in curriculum. And, you know, I'm looking to try to find our Métis values from

historical accounts, from the ways that we are in the political realm right now. Like, I'm just a- you know, it feels like I'm gathering together these fragments. And I know a fellow educator, Jennifer La Fontaine, did this gorgeous story, a digital story, around building a story from fragments. And that's what it feels like I'm doing right now. I'm pulling what I feel. We came together as Métis people, as Michif people and said, these are the things that we hold up as, as our values. I'm trying to do that because I believe that, that is the way forward for all citizens. Because if we think about our positionality as Métis/Michif educators, we sit in that in-between space. This work of reconciliation, it's not new to us. We've been doing this for hundreds of years. You know, I've often thought in my mind I haven't written about it, but we are the embodiment of reconciliation.

MM: Mmmm.

YPP: We've put aside or navigated these differences and come together in a shared vision of who we are. And to me, that's a template, I think, for what we need to realize as a nation of diverse peoples. How do we come together with all these, what people view as disparate, never-to-be-solved worldviews? How do we come together to bring forward a sense of who we are as a unique people? And I think, more so than ever in our history, we're facing a common set of challenges and I think there are answers to be found in what we have experienced as Métis peoples in our histories in the ways that we've been treated, in the ways that we've been ignored, but also in our resilience, in our strengths to continue the work despite far too many challenges. We continue the work because we see, I think, the shared humanity that we embrace in one another, right? And so those are far greater than the differences. This is not a fully fleshed-out idea. I'm sort of just working with the ideas… I'm alongside my good friend and colleague Billie Joe Grant on the writing of this, but I do think that there is answers to be found in the Métis experience.

And so, to fellow Métis educators, I know in the words of Elder Angie Crerar, we are stronger and braver together. And so, it's not about one individual person putting out their ideas. It's about us all coming together and discussing, debating, really getting authentic about our ideas and coming to some kind of a conclusion, if not consensus, on what we hold dear. And so, my hope is that that we can set aside those differences and those are so present now with across the Métis homeland, you know, and this is perhaps too idealistic, but I think that the future of our nation is far more important. And when I say nation, it's Métis nation, yes. But it's also this nation we now call Canada.

MM: Mmhmm.

YPP: How do we do that in a way that is, is going to be sustainable? That is going to represent a future that's worth fighting for? Or maybe it's a future that we, I hope we don't have to fight for. But we might have to, because I think if we look at the Métis history, we've had to fight for what we believe in. We're also understanding, I think, through our history that it is our

interconnectedness and our interrelatedness, that's that sense of kinship that is the promise, that is the hope.

Yeah, it's a big question. But I think for fellow Métis educators, nothing makes me happier than being in a space with fellow Métis educators, right? We're united in this struggle, but we're also united in the joy of who we are and understanding our with our histories. And I you know what? The creative imaginations of our people always blows me away. I just I get so excited when I hear from fellow educators what they're doing and their determination to keep going despite great odds. You know, all of those things. I think we have to keep those as our most cherished items because the days are going to be rough. You're going to feel hopeless. But I think when we come together, we understand that we're stronger and braver together. So, with that said, thank you for this incredible opportunity. It really felt good to be able to connect with you, and to spend time with you, support your work. I'm going to be your biggest cheerleader.

MM: (Laughter) kih-chi maarsii, thank you. And I cannot thank you enough, too. You've even inspired me in relation to some teaching practices I can even apply for the PED 3138 that I'm just about to teach this semester. So, I'm very excited to apply the Jeopardy (laughter).

YPP: It's fun, it's really fun right? And you've got the perfect personality to make it fun.

MM: Awww, maarsii (laughter).

YPP: Yeah.

MM: Yvonne, thank you so much for sharing space with me and for this really deeply meaningful conversation, again, certainly will not be our last. So, kih-chi maarsii.