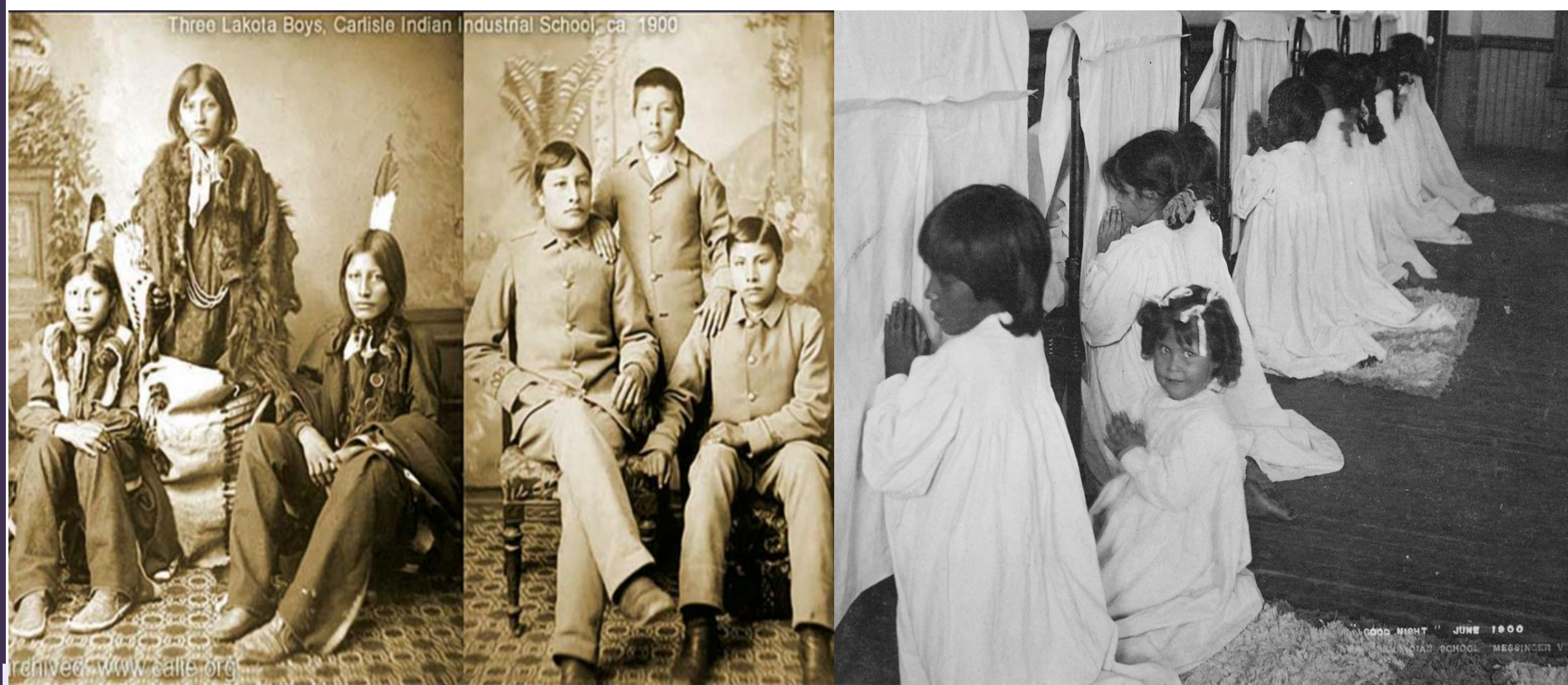


Native American Historical Trauma

- An **intergenerational trauma** defined as the **loss of life, land, & culture** due to European colonization
- **Explanation for** alarmingly high % SUDs, IPV, MH issues, physical illness among Natives
- **Not necessarily historic** – government policies continue
- Regional & tribal differences exist / effects are bidirectional (*Individual ↔ Family ↔ Tribe*)
- **Boarding schools identified as major destructive force to Native cultures**

ASSIMILATION: The Role of Boarding Schools



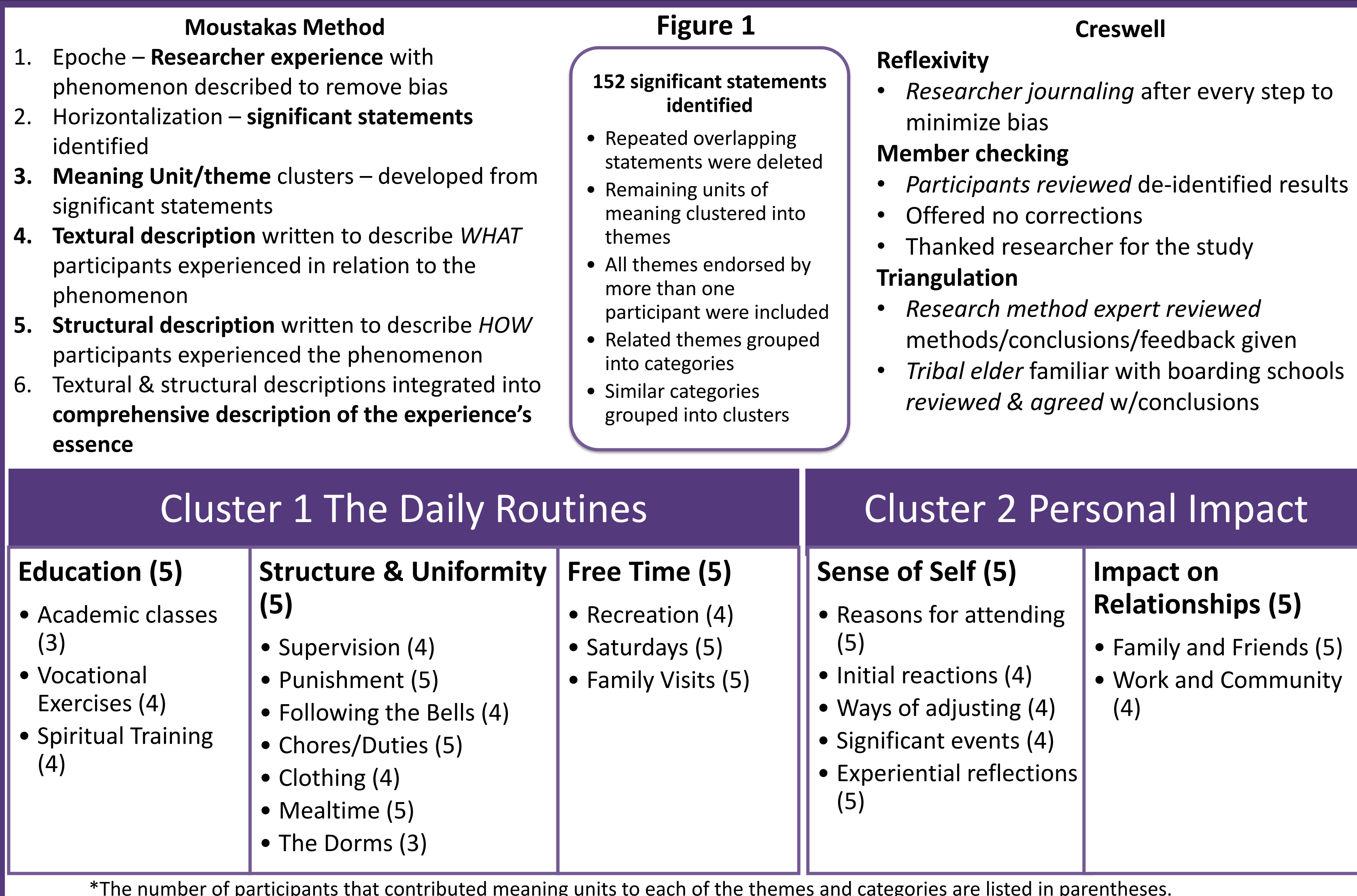
- English-speaking laborers, farmers; adopt European dress & religion / Harsh discipline conflicted with Native parenting techniques / Died from abuse and disease
- Became institutionalized, estranged from families, resentful of parents, left homeless, with low self esteem
- **Limited, prior research** about this experience **from those who lived it**; results mixed (good/awful)
- I aimed to provide a **rich description** of the lived experience of attending boarding school within the **contemporary time period** of 1945 to present to yield important information about its impact on multiple areas of the attendees' lives
- This information is useful for contextualization & treatment
- Telling one's story can be **healing**

Seneca Indian School

- 1980 doors shuttered – **attendees still alive to share their story**
- **Active alumni association** w/ ties to Wyandotte Nation, which has facilities where school once stood, hosts reunions
- Mission school 1872 → industrial school 1880 → economic hardship 1928
- 18 tribes nationwide: *Navajo, Cherokee, Osage, Otoe, Delaware, Cayuga, Arapaho, Creek, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Seminole, Cheyenne, Kickapoo, Kiowa, Pawnee, Comanche, Potawatomie, & Sac-Fox*

Method

- **5 Seneca Indian School Alumni** (3 women, 2 men) answered the questions: *What was it like to attend Seneca Indian School? What situations affected your experiences while attending the school?*
- Average age (70 years, range 60 to 78), average age upon entry (7.5 years, range 6 to 10), average length of stay (4.6 years, range 2 to 8), a span of **24 years captured** (1948 to 1972), **2 tribes** represented (Osage, Cherokee)
- **In-person, in-depth, semi-structured interviews** conducted, recorded, transcribed, de-identified, & reviewed
- Data organized & analyzed using **Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology w/strategies from Creswell** to improve accuracy & credibility (Fig. 1)
- Multicultural considerations: relationship building, elder respect, data ownership, giving back <- *my future work w/Indian Health Services*



Results

The Daily Routines “School, play, bed” – Daily routine was highly regimented, rule-governed, filled w/ chores, classes, mealtimes, & recreation, dominated by bells. Students marched to & from class, as well as following similar rules at meals.* Students learned basic reading/ writing, dance: Schottische, music: piano, & Native beadwork.* Vocational training such as pasteurization, baking, & home management served two-fold as student labor was utilized to run the school. Teachers described as fair, competent, compassionate & coursework as good. Attending weekly Christian Church services/prayer before meals/bed required.* All staff as well as proctors (14-15 y/o boys) in charge of discipline which included spanking, chores, loss of privilege for fighting, wasting food, bedwetting, speaking Native tongues.* Clothing issued*, children separated in dorm by grade & gender. Family visited anytime, children went home over holidays sometimes. Saturdays spent playing sports, board games, watching movies, listening to records, going to town.

***Differences after 1950s** Traditional beading taught, Native languages allowed, Church services optional, Rigidity surrounding dress, mealtime, marching no longer required, Students allowed off-campus weekend overnights w/ staff – *Senate Resolution 165, 90th Congress* -> *Native cultures/strengths to be supported*

Results (cont'd)

Sense of Self All participants sent to school because they had no one at home to care for them due to illness, death, alcohol. Initial reactions included fear, confusion, crying, fighting, bedwetting. Reliance on siblings & friends as source of comfort/coping. Girls' dormitory broken into by various individuals, no one physically harmed, emotional scar remains. Sexual abuse of younger kids by older students occurred & was normalized among peers – “no one told.” Several students removed by parents after a student died by suicide. In spite of these significant events, 4 participants indicated their time at **Seneca gave them a sense of hope, belonging, safety, security, self-esteem & self-efficacy**, as well as an ability and desire to maintain family connections & tribal culture – “it was a family you didn't have at home,” “our needs were met.” 1 individual said it was like being in a prison & would never recommend it “for any child.”

Impact on Relationships All participants shared a desire to never be separated from family again and to not repeat things that happened in their childhoods, particularly related to alcohol. They reported making lifelong friends, as well as learning how to trust others by seeing if they are kind, selfless, & protective. They explained that their school experience influenced their desire to support their tribal community through the teaching of culture and learning/speaking Native languages as well as working in tribal victim advocacy.

Noteworthy observations All participants' parents/grandparents went thru boarding school; some had difficulty expressing their fondness for the school, wishing they still existed to “keep families together.”

❖ Individuals still reticent to share this history.

Discussion & Conclusion

- The results of this study indicate that attending Seneca Indian boarding school from 1948 to 1972 appeared to have had a positive impact on attendees' sense of self, their capacity for resilience, and their ability and desire to maintain family connections and tribal culture.
- This information is contradictory to the dominant narrative regarding boarding schools, but supportive of regional & tribal differences in the nature and degree of historical trauma.
- One cannot assume boarding school attendance was detrimental to all those who attended. Doing so perpetuates bias that fosters mistrust in healthcare systems.
- This study would have benefitted from greater representation of tribes and from the use of objective measures for a more complete meaning of the Seneca Indian School experience.

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Thank you to the brave participants who took a risk and made themselves vulnerable in order to share their truth.