

Developing Culturally Responsive Teaching Practices in First Nations Communities: Learning Anishnaabemowin and Land-Based Teachings

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First Nations schools in northern Ontario have the dual responsibility of providing students with the skills and foundation to thrive in their community as well as in higher education outside of their community. This responsibility requires teachers to be capable of developing and implementing lessons that support academic excellence and cultural enrichment. The findings within this article are from a study that asked experienced First Nations and non-Native teachers how non-Native teachers can learn to develop culturally responsive lessons in remote First Nations schools. Within the findings, Anishnaabemowin (Native language) and land-based activities are explored as rich sources for non-Native teachers to learn to develop culturally responsive lessons. The article concludes with a discussion of the importance of linguistic and cultural learning through relationships with Elders, community members, and students.

Les écoles des Premières Nations dans le nord de l'Ontario ont la double responsabilité de fournir aux élèves les habiletés et les assises pour qu'ils puissent s'épanouir à la fois dans leurs communautés et dans des établissements d'enseignement supérieur à l'extérieur de celles-ci. De cette responsabilité découle l'obligation des enseignants de développer et mettre en pratique des leçons qui appuient l'excellence académique et l'enrichissement culturel. Cet article porte sur une étude ayant demandé à des enseignants autochtones et non-autochtones d'expérience comment les enseignants non-autochtones des écoles des Premières Nations dans des régions éloignées pourraient apprendre à développer des leçons adaptées à la culture. Les résultats indiquent que le anishnaabemowin, une langue autochtone, et les activités rattachées aux ressources naturelles constituent d'importantes sources dans lesquelles les enseignants non-autochtones pourraient puiser pour créer des leçons adaptées à la culture. L'article conclut avec une discussion sur l'importance de l'apprentissage linguistique et culturel impliquant les Aînés, les membres de la communautés et les élèves.

Developing Culturally Responsive Lessons

First Nations schools in remote northern Ontario communities have the dual responsibility of providing students with an academic foundation that promotes success in higher education, and, providing a learning environment that embodies the cultural and linguistic teachings of

home and community. The intertwining of these two responsibilities promotes active citizenship within a student's local community and in the larger Canadian society (Agbo, 2011; NAN, 2012). Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), a political organization for the 49 First Nations communities in northern Ontario, states that "[e]ducation must reflect who we are as First Nations people; it must meet the unique needs of our people" (2012, p. 15). Schools are asked to ensure that students are "equipped with learning that will help them survive in two worlds, that of their own people's plus that of the outside world" (2012, p. 64). Within the NAN territory, there are 34 First Nations schools that are run locally by community elected education authorities who hire non-Native and First Nations educators. While First Nations political organizations such as NAN provide clarity on the rights and objectives of education in First Nations communities, the specific education programmes are often determined by the individual community, education authority, and school.

A challenge with this current system rests in the preparation of teachers new to a community. Teacher training institutions are not always able to prepare teachers for every kind of community specific programming, nor are they able to prepare teachers for all of the possibilities of teaching and living in First Nations communities in northern Ontario (Oskineegish, 2013). When teachers arrive with a lack of preparation and understanding of First Nations schools and communities it can lead to confusion and disharmony between school and community (Agbo, 2007; Harper, 2000). In light of this challenge, teachers new to a First Nations community can develop lessons and pedagogical practices that are aligned with the community through the relationships they build and their willingness to learn from colleagues, students, and the community itself (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). In this article, I discuss how non-Native teachers can learn to develop culturally responsive teaching practices that are grounded in the culture of the community by learning and engaging in Anishnaabemowin (Native language) and land-based teachings. Non-Native teachers in First Nations communities in northern Ontario are encouraged to become culturally responsive educators, with the competence to merge academic excellence with cultural enrichment (NAN, 2012). Building this capacity takes time and requires non-Native teachers to make a personal effort to engage in, and learn from Anishnaabe languages and from land-based activities within the community that they teach in. The findings within this article are from a study that asked seven educators, both First Nations and non-Native, to share their views on how non-Native teachers can learn to develop culturally responsive lessons in remote First Nations communities. The educators describe the impact that cultural inclusion has on students, and offer examples of how to learn and include language and land-based teachings in collaboration with Elders, colleagues, and community members. It is understandable that non-Native teachers with no previous experience living and teaching in a remote First Nations school may feel overwhelmed by the challenge of connecting their classroom lessons and pedagogical practices with the culture of a community, especially when the activities and daily life of the community differs from their own previous experiences. It is my hope that this article will provide useful advice to non-Native teachers on how to make the connection between community and school in their lessons and their teaching practices.

Literature Review

First Nations and non-Native political organizations, scholars, educators, and community members have advocated for the inclusion of First Nations cultures and languages within

schools and curriculum (Anuik, 2008; Battiste, 2000; 2013; Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007; Kanu, 2011; NAN, 2012; Neganegijig & Breunig, 2007). In many First Nations schools there remains a division between First Nations knowledge and Western knowledge; First Nations cultural and language instruction is often under-valued, under-resourced and given only short class times, while Western knowledge is given the majority of instruction time throughout a school week (Goddard, 2002; Kirkness, 1998; Neganegijig & Breunig, 2007). This division and disregard of cultural and linguistic teachings sends the harmful and false message that First Nations students, their community, and their cultural teachings are less valuable than Western knowledge. First Nations knowledge is part of the whole student, their relationship to themselves and their communities (Battiste, 2013; Corbiere, 2000). Cultural identity and language are connected to a student's "healing; self-determination; and reclamation of identity" (Antone, 2003, p. 10). It has also been linked to a student's well-being, sense of pride, and motivation to learn (Corbiere, 2000; Greenwood & de Leeuw, 2007; Neganegijig & Breunig, 2007; Swanson, 2003). In First Nations and Inuit communities across North America, teachers are encouraged to develop and implement lessons and pedagogical practices that reflect, respond, and build upon each student's cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives (Berger, 2009; Demmert, 2011; Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan, & Renaud, 2013; Lopez, Heilig, & Schram, 2013; McMillan, 2013). This approach to teaching is most often referred to as culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002), and is known as an effective method for increasing the academic attainment of First Nations students (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Demmert & Towner, 2003; Kahontakwas, 2012). In culturally responsive teaching, the requirement to learn, adapt, and adjust is placed on the teacher who needs to have an informed understanding of each student's prior learning knowledge and practices (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Non-Native teachers new to remote First Nations communities may want to provide a meaningful learning experience for their students, but struggle to know how (Agbo, 2006; Berger & Epp, 2007; Harper, 2000). The findings within this article explore how non-Native teachers can learn to develop culturally responsive teaching practices that are meaningful and beneficial to students, promoting both well-being and academic achievement.

Personal Context

I began my teaching career in 2005 in an Oji-Cree community in Ontario's far north. Similar to many of the First Nations communities in the north, it is a fly-in community with a winter road available for only a few months each year. As a non-Native teacher originally from southern Ontario, the experience of flying into a community was new to me. I was hired as a grade 7/8 classroom teacher, and was also given the opportunity to teach grade 5/6 science. Though it was my intention to teach well, I found myself overwhelmed and under-prepared to teach effectively. The students and I had established good relationships, and I could see that they had the motivation and interest to learn and do well, and yet, despite this strong foundation, it was evident that they were struggling academically and it became clear to me that I was not meeting their learning needs. Fortunately, through the support and guidance of my colleagues, who were First Nations educators and non-Native teachers with extensive experience teaching in First Nations schools, I began to shift my teaching practices by bringing in the knowledge and expertise that existed in the community. I learned to develop lessons that complemented the activities of families in the community, and I learned what approaches to classroom

management were appropriate. During the three years that I taught in the school, I observed varying reactions from other non-Native teachers confronted with students who were struggling in school. Some of the teachers held firmly to their educational beliefs and practices; blaming the students, their parents, and the community for the challenges and learning difficulties displayed in the classroom. Other teachers would seek out solutions to the challenges they faced, and would ask themselves: "What am I doing to contribute to the challenges in the classroom?" I noticed that the teachers who sought to improve their teaching often connected better with the students and stayed in the community longer. It was this experience that influenced me to develop a study that specifically asked educators who had lived and taught in First Nations communities for an extensive amount of time what they knew about successful teaching practices in isolated or remote First Nations communities. Socio-economic challenges have an impact on the education of many First Nations students, and is also important in understanding and overcoming the challenges that exist in First Nations education (Goulet, 2001; Levin, 1995; NAN, 2012), however, understanding this impact does not take away from the strengths and resources available to all educators in First Nations schools and communities. This article focuses on the positive impact that teachers can have on student learning through their approach to teaching, their engagement within a community, and their relationships with students, parents, and community members.

Overview of the Study

The findings discussed within this article are drawn from a qualitative study influenced by Indigenous methodology (Kovach, 2009; Porsanger, 2004; Smith, 2012; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). My goal in developing this study was to further my learning and understanding of teaching in First Nations communities in northern Ontario. I had gained tremendous support and learning opportunities in my teaching experience and wanted to further explore the opportunities and possibilities for effective teaching in First Nations communities in northern Ontario. It was clear to me that the relationships that I was building were foundational to my teaching. As I began to learn about Indigenous methodology I saw that relationships would need to be at the heart of my own research (Kovach, 2009; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). The main research question that guided the study was: What do experienced educators (First Nations and non-Native) believe that non-Native teachers should know about planning and teaching First Nations students in remote communities in northern Ontario? I began seeking potential participants for the study by inviting educators who I knew and with whom I had an established relationship and trust. Kovach (2009) refers to this as relationship-based research within Indigenous inquiry. She notes that trust between the researcher and the research participants must develop, either through pre-existing relationships or through a process of sharing and building relationships within the research process. Seven educators agreed to be part of the study, four First Nations and three non-Native, all of whom had worked and lived, or continue to work and live, in remote First Nations communities in northern Ontario or northern Manitoba. I had pre-existing relationships with five of the participants, and spoke with participants, educators, and parents for recommendations for further potential participants. My criteria for participant involvement included experience creating culturally enriched lessons in remote First Nations communities, mentorship of non-Native teachers or mentorship from First Nations teachers, and if possible, extensive experience teaching First Nations students in northern Ontario, and in two cases, northern Manitoba.

Method

The main method utilized in the study was semi-structured interviews (Kovach, 2009; Steinhauer, 2002). Wilson (2001) reminds researchers that research methods allow for the formation of relationships between researcher, participant, and the research topic. The use of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to share their responses, opinions, stories, and ideas on the research topic without “the periodic disruptions involved in adhering to a structured approach” (Kovach, 2009, p. 124). I had given pre-set questions to participants before the interviews, to allow participants time to reflect on their responses, as well as time to add what they felt was important to discuss within the topic of study. The pre-set questions included three sections, beginning with personal and teaching background, followed by personal teaching philosophy and successful education practices, and finally, advice to non-Native teachers new to northern First Nations communities. I spoke for approximately one hour in length with five participants by phone and two in person in Thunder Bay. I asked participants if I could audio record our conversations so that I could focus on being an active listener, engaging with what the participant valued on this topic.

With each participant, I spent time engaging in informal discussions separate from the semi-structured interviews. For the two participants that were new to me, I began by sharing with them who I am, my experience as an educator, and my interest to further my learning of teaching in First Nations communities, and in turn, they shared with me their experiences, and their interests within this topic. For the participants who already knew me, we had informal conversations on the topic and the guiding questions. The informal discussions with participants allowed each participant to share with me what approach they would like to take during the recorded semi-structured interviews. For example, a few of the participants told me that they had written down their responses and wanted to begin by reading them to me. In these cases, I found participants began by reading but then moved to conversations as they became more comfortable. After each recorded conversation, I transcribed the audio-recordings and provided each participant an opportunity to review the transcription to ensure that I accurately transcribed their knowledge and information. The time and space between the semi-structured interviews and follow up conversations allowed the opportunity for each participant to think about their responses, and make any adjustments as they saw fit. Four of the participants responded with additional comments and ideas to what they had previously said in the interviews. One of the participants who provided additional responses told me that she was initially nervous and thought of more ideas after our interview had ended. I entered the transcribed notes into a qualitative coding software and reviewed all of the conversations to identify emergent themes.

I had aspired to conduct research that resonated with Indigenous methodology by working primarily with participants who were my teaching mentors and who confidently directed our conversations within the semi-structured interviews. In this article I discuss aspects of the study that can inform cultural inclusion, language, and land as catalysts to successful education practices. Three of the participants wanted to remain anonymous. Out of respect for their anonymity, I have left out their names and provided only general background information.

Findings

All of the educators in the study unanimously supported cultural inclusion in First Nations

education. From their advice and examples, cultural inclusion refers to the inclusion of Anishnaabe languages, local knowledge and history, and land-based skills and practices. Five of the educators explained why non-Native teachers need to learn about a student's cultural background, with two of the five educators sharing their personal experiences of learning in a school system that is void of First Nations knowledge and culture.

A. Jane Tuesday, a First Nations educator for over 35 years, shared her thoughts on the positive effect that cultural inclusion has on students:

I have seen students' self-esteem increase when a teacher knows the language and includes First Nation culture in the classroomWhen somebody comes along and includes culture as part of their teaching it really uplifts them to see that they are of value, because even in our books and our teaching there's really nothing about Aboriginal values in the school system. (personal communication, March 31, 2012)

Teachers may find that there is a lack of culturally appropriate resources in their classrooms and including those books and curriculum resources may take a personal effort. A First Nations teacher who taught in her own community described how she chose novels by Ojibwa author Ruby Slipperjack entitled *Honour the Sun*, *Weesquachak and the Lost Ones*, and *Little Voice* for students to read. She purposefully chose Ruby's novels as they depicted an accurate representation of culture, family, and everyday living in northern Ontario. Observing the reactions of the students while reading these novels, she said:

The students did not want to stop reading them because they could relate to it. The stories and the characters and the setting and all of that, they were excited. To see them excited about something was great. They were hungry for their stories. (personal communication, February 13, 2012)

Audrey Smith, a non-Native teacher who has taught for 30 years in Newfoundland and over five years in First Nations schools in northern Manitoba and northern Ontario shared her own experience seeing student interest and motivation increase when she included topics that they could relate to:

They participate more in the discussion because they understand what you are talking about. They talk about it in their own language and things like that. It gives them the feeling that their way of life is important, like when you are talking about hunting or fishing then they'll know what you are talking about but if you start talking about something like a subway or an apartment complex some of them will have no idea what you are talking about, so they are not interested, they are not motivated. If you talk about things that they will understand then you got them interested and motivated. (personal communication, April 16, 2012)

Brenda Firman, a non-Native teacher with over 15 years of experience teaching in First Nations schools asks teachers to think of this: "if the children don't see *who they are* represented in their school, in their classroom, and in their education, then how can we ever expect them to engage with that education?" (personal communication, March 10, 2012). When teachers recognize the positive impact that cultural inclusion has on student interest and motivation, they too may become more motivated to build and implement lessons that have a positive effect on student learning.

A First Nations teacher who has taught in her own community for over five years shared her

personal reasons for including a student's culture in the classroom: "I think it is very important for a teacher to use [a student's cultural] background, because when I was younger and going to school, I didn't know my own identity and I felt lost for a long time" (personal communication, February 15, 2012). She added that when teachers seek to include and value students' ways of knowing it allows for them "to see who they are, and to see how important it is to be *who* you are" (personal communication, February 15, 2012). As a teacher in the primary grades, she has included traditional foods and games in her classroom by making bannock and recommends teaching older students how to prepare a goose. The experience of losing one's own identity in education is echoed in A. Jane's experience:

I really promote that the Aboriginal way of teaching is so important because that's part of their culture. It's hard to separate that. But I think being Aboriginal I understand that really well because that is where I come from too. I went through that system; I went up to grade 12 with five years of university, but a price I had to pay for it was a lot, I paid a huge price to get an education. (personal communication, March 31, 2012)

The lessons and pedagogical practices that a teacher employs should not be in opposition to a student's cultural identity. When teachers become responsive to student culture and include appropriate aspects of culture they will see a difference in motivation, interest, and self-esteem (Swanson, 2003). One method for learning and supporting culturally responsive practices is through Native language.

Learning Anishinaabemowin (Native Language)

The benefits of language immersion or active use of Native language(s) within schools has been documented in examples of successful First Nation, Métis, and Inuit school programs (e.g., Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007). A big step for non-Native teachers in demonstrating support for Anishnaabe languages is to be open to learn and include Native language in their classroom. Learning a language reveals the history and values of a community. Brenda advises non-Native teachers to learn words and their translation, to take a closer look at what the pieces of the words mean, to begin to understand the history of the language and the community. She explains:

When you bring language in and choose to learn more about the language, particularly getting away from a translation approach to the language, then you start to learn more as a non-Aboriginal person about the values and norms because it is embedded in the language. (personal communication, March 10, 2012).

She explains this further:

What are the pieces of the word that make up that word and what do those pieces mean and when you put them together, what is the thought that comes across as you use that word? I always say don't translate the words translate the idea. Translate the feelings, translate the connections, don't give me a word for word translation but it really does go deeper when it is taken apart so it was something that was part of mentoring or part of training non-Aboriginal teachers to come to understand some of that, and that might be a gift that they actually take to a community when they start asking people to help bring some of the language into the classroom. (personal communication, March 10, 2012)

Actively learning the language makes a huge difference. It models respect, it models the value of learning the language and it aids a teacher's cultural competency as mentioned earlier. A non-Native teacher, who taught in a Cree community for almost 10 years, shared his experience learning Cree:

As a teacher I tried to learn the language, I would sit in during their Cree classes. It was a Cree community and so I would sit in them and try to practice and experience that. Actually, my first few years I would put the Cree word of the week, simple things like "niskak" for geese, and I would practice it and put it on the wall. (personal communication, January 30, 2012)

Non-Native educators may feel uncomfortable with the use of a new language in their classroom, however, the teachers in this study encouraged non-Native teachers to push past their discomforts to not only allow students to speak their language but also to actively bring the language into the classroom themselves. If the students speak fluently, teachers are encouraged to allow them the space to speak it freely, to let them be the instructor and help the teacher learn from them, or, if the students do not know their language fluently, then both teacher and students can learn together.

Audrey included language in her classroom by inviting Elders from the community and recommended that to other non-Native teachers. She said: "Have [Elders] visit, get the children to play some games or something where they are using their language and you know they could point to certain things and get the Elders to say it in their language then have the children repeat it" (personal communication, April 16, 2012). Audrey emphasized that it is up to the teacher to make time in their daily schedule for language activities. She said teachers "would certainly have to make time in their schedule to bring in the Elders, parents and get them to talk to the children" (personal communication, April 16, 2012). Elders are "rich sources of knowledge for language and cultural transmission" (Neganegijig & Breunig, 2007, p. 310). Through relationships with community members, non-Native teachers can learn who is available and willing to come into the schools, as well as the proper protocol for inviting Elders and guests into the school and classroom. The influence of Elders in Native literacy is discussed by Paulsen (2003) who writes:

When teachings are passed from the Elders to the younger generations, literacy takes on the traditional form and is being lived out in contemporary society. Thereby literacy becomes the active form of learning, evident in one's development of knowledge, values, and way of being. Literacy is brought back into the everyday lives of Native peoples—reconnecting intergenerational ties and being infused into the lifelong process of affirming Aboriginality. (p. 26)

Inviting Elders and community members into the classroom can also help non-Native teachers to create time for their own learning. Language becomes part of the whole learning environment, with both students and teacher learning together. It is these efforts that teachers make that will help erode divisive practices between Native language instruction and Western curriculum learning.

Though non-Native teachers are highly encouraged to bring the language into the school, their classroom, and their teaching, it is also important to remember that language instruction can move beyond the classroom setting and onto the land (Neganegijig & Breunig, 2007).

Language and land are intertwined and inseparable. Although I placed it into two separate discussions, they actually flow together as one.

Learning from and with Land-Based Activities

Mary Oskineegish, a First Nations educator who has taught for over 25 years in her community said that “whenever we try to bring cultural activities into the school it doesn’t really work, we have to take the students out into the land and the teacher has to be willing to go to these activities too” (personal communication, February 14, 2012). In her experience she has noticed that “when the teacher really wants to teach the students he or she goes along with the class” (personal communication, February 14, 2012). At times, it may not be possible for teachers to go on outdoor excursions; for example, if only some of the students leave for cultural land activities the teacher may be responsible for being with the students who do not go. The non-Native educator who taught in a Cree community, shared his experience in this situation. He connected land activities with classroom learning by asking students to share their experiences through writing or speaking or by example: “they would show me what they did and show me how they do their traps” (personal communication, January 30, 2012). He further explained that when students left for hunting, fishing, or trapping, they “were accommodated, they were allowed to leave, they weren’t punished for it and whatever work I could get for them when they got back then that is how we worked things out” (personal communication, January 30, 2012). The more knowledge and experience teachers have of their students’ experiences on the land the easier it becomes for them to merge their land learning with their classroom learning. He also shared how he immersed himself in community life by hunting with community members. He said: “Geese was the big hunting that would be in the fall and spring, and I would join them before classes. I would join the men and the kids and be up at 5:00 or 6:00 and go to 8:30 or 9:00” (personal communication, January 30, 2012).

Some schools will incorporate cultural days and or land activities into the school calendar; for example, Mary discussed some of these activities:

There’s a lot of activities in our community. We have our cultural days; in one week we go moose hunting in September, most of the First Nations teachers in this community go out hunting with their families and with students The non-Native teachers, some of them go out, but a lot them get left behind, because they don’t really like being out in the land. In April we also do geese hunting—that is another cultural activity—we also have to go out into the land for that too. (personal communication, February 14, 2012)

Mary also shared a lesson she developed while teaching a grade 5/6 class. It was a fish netting lesson for Language Arts that incorporated Native Language and land-based learning. She said:

I’m going to talk about the fish netting lesson I do in the winter months First we had to get a fish net that was 100 yards long that had no floaters or sinkers It almost took us a week to do this, to go and set up this net because we had to start from scratch. We put on the floaters and the sinkers, and then after that we went out onto the lake We went out into the land and got some community members to make holes on the ice for us. Then we tried to find where it was; there is a tapping sound that you have to hear under the ice and that is where you make another hole, and that’s what we did, then we set up the net. I told them all the things in my language, every word that was involved, like

when you pull the rope, and they really enjoyed it. The next day, we set it up and then two days later we went to check it. I would tell them what words we were going to use and I would explain it too in English. And then when we came back [to the fish net], like maybe on the fifth day, we would write stories about it. They really enjoy those kinds of things. (personal communication, February 14, 2012)

The success of this lesson was not that it was an outdoor activity; rather, that it was a meaningful outdoor project that incorporated learning skills important to community and school.

Similar to learning Anishinaabemowin, working and learning in relationship with Elders is repeated in land-based activities. A. Jane explained that decisions regarding cultural activities are made with communication from Elders:

Some of the Elders have told us “we want our kids to know how to snare, how to hunt, how to fish, how to set up traps, we want our kids to know those things,” so that’s why we do that here, it’s the parents asking, or telling us this is what they want. (personal communication, March 31, 2012)

Land-based education, language instruction, Elders, and community members can be part of a student’s everyday learning experience. It is also how non-Native educators can learn about the values and practices of the community and incorporate them into the school. A. Jane shared an example of a program that included Elders and land-based education:

What we’ve done here at our school is that we bring in Elders, once a week we bring in somebody. We do a lot of storytelling because that is one of the main ways of learning So you know we have Elders that are sharing our stories with us, community people coming into our classrooms, talking about the old days, and they take kids out on the land. We have a program here called Native culture where we have a Native culture teacher but he has helpers from the community and they take kids out on the land and we teach kids how to trap, how to snare rabbits, going out to identify different herbs, different medicinal plants, we have all that going on here. (personal communication, March 31, 2012)

Developing culturally responsive practices does not require non-Native teachers to become experts in First Nations culture and language; what it does require is teachers to be open and aware of including other ways of teaching, and open to assistance from those who can help in teaching language and land-based activities. Brenda explains this further:

With cultural competency, then you are open and aware, and then bringing the language in, and searching out people who will do that, making the spaces open for them so that they can do it in their own way and in a good way, going on the land and connecting the language and the land there as well. This is where the students can begin to re-learn who they are. (personal communication, March 10, 2012)

Teachers who arrive in a community open to learning land-based teachings can further their understanding of how school and home learning can be intertwined, and how, school policies, rules, lessons, and practices can also clash, causing a disjointed learning experience for students.

Discussion

In all of the examples of learning to connect culture, language, and land with school learning,

the commonality was in the relationships with local First Nations community members. Relationships with people are at the core of learning culture. Curwen Doige (2003) clarifies how people, not artifacts, define culture. She wrote:

Traditions are only one aspect of the ever-changing dynamic within a culture. So to focus on traditional dress, food, music, ceremonies, and artifacts freezes a culture in time and perpetuates stereotypes. Artifacts are static. People and their values, beliefs, feelings, and thoughts are dynamic, and these define the culture. (p. 150)

The relationships with Elders, community members, and students provide non-Native teachers with a multitude of resources in learning to develop culturally responsive lessons. Learning Anishnaabemowin or land-based activities alone are not catalysts for becoming culturally responsive teachers, it is in the building of relationships while learning that build a teacher's capacity to connect lessons and teaching practices to the needs of students and their cultural backgrounds (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013). The educators in this study encouraged non-Native teachers to learn from within the community. Non-Native teachers were not advised to try to become experts in traditional skills or language; they were encouraged to build community connections, and to learn how to invite and include Elders, local colleagues, and community members who would be willing to support language or land-based activities. Castagno & Brayboy (2008) linked a teacher's ability to engage in culturally responsive practices with a high degree of cultural competency, describing cultural competency as "a constant learning process that requires flexibility and adaptability on the part of the educator depending on the particular students and contexts with which they are working" (p. 947). The findings in this article support this as non-Native teachers are encouraged to be open and willing to learn. The advice from educators also provides examples of how teachers can deepen their learning either through their own personal time, such as goose hunting in the early morning, or during school hours, inviting Elders into the classroom, or going to land-based activities arranged by the school or community. Developing culturally responsive teaching practices primarily occurs in schools and communities, though teacher education programs can provide teachers with a knowledge and understanding of First Nations education and culture-based teaching, the specific knowledge and understanding of students, and remote communities in northern Ontario stem from within a community. Learning Anishnaabemowin and participating in land-based activities is just one example of how teachers new to a First Nations community can incorporate the specific cultural and linguistic knowledge within their teaching practices. In the NAN (2012) education report it states: "Our children were deprived of learning their own language and culture; the schools were focused on assimilating our people and destroying our identity. It is now time to reverse the trend in our First Nations schools" (p. 62). The educators in this study identified language and culture as an essential step toward effective teaching. Non-Native teachers can support language and cultural initiatives in a community by actively learning Anishnaabemowin and land-based activities, and by learning how to merge them with their own teaching practices.

Conclusion

The findings in this article support culturally responsive practices by providing specific examples on how to learn from within a First Nations community. One of the challenges for

non-Native teachers in learning to develop culturally responsive lessons is the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations that could further marginalize students. Teaching in a cross-cultural context requires teachers to become knowledgeable of the culture of the students and community, and also in their own pre-conceptions of culture and difference (Lorenz, 2013). It is important that non-Native teachers do not associate cultural differences with academic deficiency (Battiste, 1998; Curwen Doige, 2003; Lorenz, 2013). The educators in this study did not give one prescribed method of developing culturally responsive lessons, instead, they described the importance of learning, engaging, and experiencing the activities that are built through relationships with people and place. Cultural activities are the traditional teachings that have sustained communities, families, and culture. Non-Native teachers can work to support the cultural ways of the community by learning to develop lessons grounded within the way of life of the community. It is essential to become an educator who works alongside a community and not against it. The multitude of examples shared reveal the efforts successful educators have made to prepare and teach lessons that are best for their students' learning needs. These examples are not necessarily taught in teacher education programs, but are just examples of what non-Native teachers can incorporate into their teaching if they are open and willing to engage in the cultural and linguistic teachings of a community.

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