

# New Paths, Old Ways: Exploring the Places of Influence on the Role Identity

David W. Friesen  
University of Regina

Jeff Orr  
St. Francis Xavier University

---

*This article explores the teacher role identities of seven graduates of an Aboriginal teacher education program in the northern part of a Canadian prairie province. As they occupy a variety of positions in several northern educational systems, their stories reveal that these teachers are positively influencing northern students, schools, and communities. The themes presented in this article emerged from conversations with these northern educators and suggest that their Aboriginal teacher role identities were shaped by Aboriginal language and culture, the northern environment, and supportive northern educational and familial social systems. In the discussion of the themes, it is suggested that Aboriginal teachers' identities continue to be nurtured and shaped by a growing cultural narrative of Aboriginal self-determination.*

## *The Need to Hear Aboriginal Teachers' Voices*

Education in the international context is increasingly responding to the needs of Aboriginal populations in the world through programs that recognize the culture of indigenous groups (Craft, 1996; Justiz & Kameen, 1994). Included in this response are increased opportunities in higher education, including teacher education, for First Peoples who were well established in Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and Canada long before the arrival of Europeans (Barnhardt, 1991; McTaggart, 1991; Swisher, 1995; Gale, 1996). Although many of these programs are described in the literature, few studies represent the experiences of the participants themselves. This research attempts to address this lacuna in the literature by exploring Aboriginal teacher role identity through the experiences of seven graduates of an Aboriginal teacher education program in their various roles as educators in the northern part of a Canadian prairie province.

Teacher role identity has to do with "the way in which individuals think about themselves as teachers—the images they have of self-as-teacher" (Knowles, 1993, p. 99). Knowles links teacher biography to subsequent teaching practice, showing that students come to teacher education not as empty vessels, but with years of childhood, family, school, and previous teaching experiences. Together these experiences form their ideas about teaching and learning and are enacted in teaching practice in various ways.

We are both non-Aboriginal and former faculty members with the Aboriginal teacher education program from which the participants graduated. Long after joining southern teacher education institutions, we continued to hear stories about our former students and their influence as Aboriginal educators on northern

education. We began to propose ways to document their influences without evaluating them or comparing them with non-Aboriginal teachers. We wondered what it was about their teacher identity that enabled them to influence positively students, schools, and communities. We wished to find out what Aboriginality means for their teaching by gaining insight into the notion of Aboriginal teacher role identity. Our initial contact with the graduates to propose this project was greeted with overwhelming support.

Several assumptions guide this work drawn from our extensive experience in the north. Although there is considerable evidence that teacher education experiences tend to play a less important role in forming a teacher role identity, we contend that Aboriginal teachers' biographies have been powerfully shaped by culturally responsive teacher education experiences in this Aboriginal teacher education institution. We argue, therefore, that Aboriginal teacher role identities, which are influencing northern education, can be significantly attributed to their teacher education program along with other early family and community experiences. We also contend that Aboriginal teacher role identities appear to shape and be shaped by Aboriginal forms of education in the north.

The participants expressed a need for others to hear about their experiences. We speak on behalf of the participants. Although we would prefer that this work be done by the educators involved, we believe we have a responsibility and an obligation as university educators to report this research in appropriate journals to influence policy-makers and administrators concerning Aboriginal education. We fully recognize that telling these stories also reflects our own view of what is significant.

### *The Teacher Education Context*

Aboriginal teacher education programs (TEPs) initially emerged in the mid 1970s in many regions as a response to the dual problems of university access for Aboriginal people and problems in K-12 education (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972). Some of these programs provided entry to on-campus programs; others were modifications of regular programs; still others were off-campus programs with strong Aboriginal control.

In Saskatchewan, TEPs were established to provide educational opportunities for Aboriginal people in order to ensure an informed citizenry and full participation in the economic life of the province. With the highest per capita Aboriginal population in Canada, Saskatchewan took seriously its obligation to reverse the underrepresentation of First Nations and Metis people in the teaching profession (Carnegie, 1991).

The Northern Teacher Education Program (NORTEP) was established in 1976 to prepare teachers specifically for northern Saskatchewan. The first major purpose of NORTEP is to influence positively northern education through the provision of an off-campus, field-based, Aboriginally oriented university teacher education program for Indian and Metis people. The second is to contribute to northern social and economic development. To accomplish these two purposes the program seeks to reduce the level of teacher turnover in northern schools, to address the severe underrepresentation of First Nations teachers, to provide Aboriginal role models for northern schoolchildren, to reduce pupil-teacher linguistic and cultural barriers

by promoting northern Aboriginal languages and culture in northern schools, to overcome school-community barriers, and to provide access for northerners of Aboriginal ancestry to postsecondary education and salary-based employment. NORTEP has a Board of Governors that comprises elected members from the Northern Lights School Division, the Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and the Prince Albert Grand Council. Both universities in the province approve instructional staff and courses and work in partnership to grant degrees, and funding is provided by provincial, federal, and First Nations governments.

NORTEP offers a four-year BEd program in elementary and middle years education, a recently begun small-scale secondary program, and a two-year introductory program in arts and science. Students spend several weeks at the La Ronge center taking courses, and then return to their home communities to work with experienced teachers for one to two weeks every month. Besides core classes in Indian studies and Aboriginal languages, all NORTEP-based courses are infused with northern Aboriginal perspectives with the specific purpose of preparing teachers who can understand and teach with an Aboriginal and northern focus.

As of 1997 NORTEP 216 teachers had graduated, of whom 173 were teaching, furthering their university education, or working in an education-related field. Of the total, 149 graduates were classroom teachers working primarily in band-operated or provincial schools in northern Saskatchewan (NORTEP, 1997). In the Northern Lights School Division, the largest northern provincial school division, the percentage of Aboriginal teachers increased from 3% in 1976 to 25% in 1990 due to the availability of NORTEP graduates (Carnegie, 1991).

Although some research has been done on the TEPs, little examines the experiences of students or graduates. Hesch (1995) makes a valuable contribution by examining how student teachers resist the dominant curriculum of internship. The research reported in this article complements that research by adding the voices of the graduates of a TEP program.

### *Methodology and Research Design*

One way to gain insight into teachers' biographies, knowledge, and concerns is through their stories (Witherell & Noddings, 1991; Aoki, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). Stories capture the rich complexity of teachers' lives in a holistic way (Bruner, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988). This research follows the lead of other teacher educators who study the lives of teachers through their stories (Goodson, 1992; Goodson & Cole, 1993; Knowles, 1993). Conversational interviews, becoming more common in qualitative research (Carson, 1986), were used to collect the teacher stories. In relation to Aboriginal research, narrative is culturally appropriate for conveying Aboriginal teachers' stories (Hampton, 1993). We found that conversation is well suited to northern hospitality because it promotes personal relationships that allow people to give undivided attention to each other's concerns (Yonemura, 1982). We also found that this approach helped us resist taking a position of privilege over and against the participants (Florio-Ruane, 1991).

As former teacher educators with a northern Aboriginal teacher educator program, we obtained the permission of several school divisions, the northern teacher education institution, and a band council to record conversations with the graduates to hear their perspectives on being Aboriginal teachers in the north. Our

interest emerged from our experiences as teachers and teacher educators in the north and our knowledge that stories of northern Aboriginal teachers could lead to a better understanding of Aboriginal teacher role identity and the influence it has on northern education. Ethics approval was granted by the University and permission of the individual teachers obtained through a detailed consent form that outlined the research and the proposed publication of their stories. Although we were both non-Aboriginal, we had strong support from the teachers and educators involved. Stories collected from our conversations with them were sent back for verification. They consented to having their stories included in a monograph provided the identification of individuals and places was protected. Pseudonyms are used in all publication of this work and no specific schools or communities are identified.

We engaged in conversations with 36 graduates of NORTEP over the course of a year. We explored the teachers' early experiences such as time spent on the trapline, the influence of parents and grandparents, and the effect of schooling experiences on the development of Aboriginality. The conversations went on to explore graduates' later experiences in teacher education and their more recent experiences in northern education. We examined the stories that emerged from the conversations for meaningful themes. Some of the stories and themes arising from the research are contained in two monographs (Friesen & Orr, 1995, 1996a). Our earlier work explored the notion of teacher identity (Friesen & Orr, 1996b), and this article extends that work by focusing more specifically on the influences on Aboriginal teacher identity.

The communities in which the seven teachers in this study live are diverse. Other than one large central community that has a substantial non-Native population, these are Native communities. Each is in the process of reconstructing a narrative of Aboriginal control over their own affairs such as education. The teachers in this study serve in a variety of unique roles such as high school teacher, mayor, school board member, school administrator, adult education administrator, and Cree language instructor, reminding us that Aboriginal graduates are assuming a variety of positions of influence in northern education.

The seven teachers on which this article is based are fairly representative of the 36 who participated in this study (Friesen & Orr, 1995, 1996a) in that they take into account gender, early or late graduates, position in the educational system, and type of community. However, their experiences, although having common themes, reveal individual identities that defy generalizability. All participants claimed to be of Aboriginal descent.

### *The Places that Influence Aboriginal Teacher Role Identities*

As we reviewed the conversations with the seven teachers, we sensed some common threads. They confirm a common narrative of Aboriginal northern education that is developing toward self-determination. The places that influence Aboriginal teacher role identity are found in early experiences of life, in teacher education, in the connection to the land, and in a supportive northern educational and social context. The narrative of Aboriginal self-determination is nurtured in these places and appears to serve as a guiding beacon for teachers' work. The following ex-

plorations of these places has shown us the complexity of the formation of Aboriginal teacher identities.

### *Early Family Experiences as a Place for Learning Language and Culture*

In all the conversations, the teachers talked about their early childhood family experiences embedded in northern Native language and culture. They recounted these experiences in ways that suggest that Aboriginal identity was experienced positively. Frank, a Native language teacher, nostalgically recalls memories of learning a Native language and goes on to tell how his father taught him respect for the land.

I learned Mitchiff, that's French and Cree. I learned a lot of the old language too from my dad. I remember the way he used to speak to the other older people ... My dad was experienced on the trap line ... It has given me a strong connection to the land. I feel like I know more about the old way of life. I remember my dad used to show us how to camp without a tent or how to make a hole in the snow in the winter time to make shelters. He got me to respect the weather and water. He taught me a lot of respect for the land.

Each story about the past makes positive reference to the place of Native language, the land, and cultural activities undertaken as a close-knit family. For example, this comment from one of the graduates shows the interrelationship of these elements:

As a young person I spent some time up there on the trap line with my dad and then with my mom. And I suppose I learned this value of respect from my parents, especially from my mom who has respect for everybody, you know. It doesn't matter who you are. She'll stop and take a few minutes to talk and say hello. She has shared some of her insights into many things with me and as you get older and you think about them a little more, then they start to make sense. Of course, when I was 13 they mean nothing to me, but now that I'm older ... I saw other people ... a lot of Native people who spoke Cree and lived in both worlds.

The stories also told about experiences of these individuals growing up where Aboriginality was regularly discounted by others. As a result, the use of Native language and involvement in cultural practices were discontinued. Many we interviewed experienced a loss of pride in their Aboriginality after entering the school system.

### *NORTEP as a Place for Family, Language, and Culture*

Many of the teachers talked about NORTEP as a place where their dormant Aboriginality was awakened and revived. NORTEP was regularly identified by the graduates as a particularly supportive part of the educational environment. Glenda, a postsecondary administrator, makes this point as follows.

NORTEP added to my sense of Aboriginal identity and expanded my understanding. Without those instructors, I definitely would not have that attitude and outcome. It was the instructors that were there and the experience that they brought with them because they were northerners.

Rather than working against her Aboriginality, NORTEP affirmed the Aboriginal identity of this teacher. For many of these teachers, this institution served as a place



that helped awaken their identities through affirmation of their Aboriginal language and culture, and it helped integrate their Aboriginality with their teaching.

Michael, a high school teacher, claims that NORTEP “reinforced my identity ... It made me look at things. It put order into my life.” Tina, a mayor of a Native community, claims that “NORTEP helped through Native Studies—actually learning about Native people ... to be proud of who I am.” All graduates confirmed that their teacher education program was a place that restored and reinforced their pride in their Aboriginal identity.

NORTEP was often identified as the vehicle that brings diverse groups together in the north. The graduates speak about their time at NORTEP with affection because of the friendships and the networks formed. In the position of school administrator, Bonnie wants to maintain a family-like unity she experienced at NORTEP.

I think one of the things I remember about NORTEP was that family unity we had. We worked together as a family. We always were told “We are family. We are working together as a family.” And since we have left NORTEP, we have never had another family like that. You don’t have anybody with the same goals and things that you have, and the only ones that you have here are your NORTEP colleagues because they understand that unity that you had there. In the school, here, we try to continue it.

Graduates claim that they would never have had the opportunity to become teachers if they had been required to go south. The most dreaded aspect of going south identified by graduates of NORTEP is isolation from family and community.

Graduates identified Native Studies courses and Cree/Dene language courses as central to Aboriginal identity affirmation. At NORTEP these components were for the most part taught by Aboriginal instructors with whom the students could identify. These seven teachers were dismayed that Aboriginal content had been withheld from them during their K-12 schooling and consistently identified Aboriginal courses as the best ones taken at NORTEP.

As a recent graduate, Tina wants her students to know the excitement of learning about their heritage just as she did at NORTEP:

I think NORTEP grads have influenced the school. Like, one of the very first classes I took when I went to NORTEP was Native Studies and I excelled in that class; I did really well. I thought, “Well, heck, if this is a university class and it’s so interesting and I love learning about myself and I’m doing so well, the rest of the classes will be a breeze.” So that whole thing about learning about your own culture is important and I think more so with the school students who are becoming aware of their own culture and becoming proud of who they are.... I teach Native Studies and I find it interesting—well, the kids don’t know anything about their culture and so Native Studies—like wow, they can’t believe how interesting it is. So I’m able to give off that same kind of enthusiasm that I experienced at NORTEP.

The teachers cite a multitude of other benefits of their time at NORTEP from gaining confidence—“NORTEP changed me from being quiet, so to speak, and not really wanting to get involved to that next step of being actively involved in the community”—to instilling a sense of pride in their identity: “NORTEP helped me to be proud of who I am.”

Because NORTEP is located in the north, with its predominantly Aboriginal population, it is easier to staff it with Native northerners, to exhibit a curriculum

infused with Native content, and to ensure governance by a predominantly Aboriginal board. As an Aboriginal place it provides an institutional culture that is not only understanding of and responsive to Aboriginal people, but is considered Aboriginal in nature.

### *The School System as a Place for Language, Family, and Culture*

Aboriginal teachers in this study generally allude to a supportive educational context in northern Saskatchewan that has the effect of accommodating their Aboriginal teacher role identities. Both school systems in which the seven educators work have curriculum departments dedicated to the development of Aboriginal language and culture. Although Cree language teachers express a certain degree of frustration in setting up programs, they recognize the support they get from their school systems. Some NORTEP graduates see Cree and Dene language programs as tokenism with little meaningful support aimed at keeping the languages alive. Some experience a great deal of isolation as teachers of Aboriginal language and culture. Nevertheless, NORTEP graduates generally find the northern systems receptive to their Aboriginality and to curriculum changes that value Aboriginal world view and content.

The participants often referred to the support of other aspects of the educational environment. This strong Aboriginal presence in the school systems in northern Saskatchewan makes graduates comfortable. Specifically, other Aboriginal teachers and administrators, band council and school board members, as well as Aboriginal parents and community members generally support them as teachers. The fact that NORTEP graduates are able to speak their language inside school classrooms and staff rooms shows how the educational system is being influenced by the presence of Aboriginal people. This accepting atmosphere provides the motivation for graduates to teach Cree so that, like Frank, they can recover what has been lost:

I like the job of teaching Cree. I'm helping myself too by learning the language and regaining the things I lost ... When I speak to an elder I tell them what I'm doing, "I am a teacher" and they seem really interested in what I'm doing. I use the Cree word for teacher and they seem really happy and proud of me. I just find they're generally happy about what I'm doing. That's really positive. Then I tell them what I teach and they seem really happy, especially the older people. They have a sense of pride in stuff like that.

Bonnie, the administrator, expresses this Aboriginal view of self when talking about her responsibility to the Native community she is from. Her reason for teaching is directly related to being Aboriginal

If you've talked to the rest of the NORTEP graduates, I think one of the things is the caring part. We're living with these kids for the rest of our lives and we have to teach them something. We're going to be with them. Every one of us from here that graduated from NORTEP, is going to live here for the rest of our lives. I think I feel a responsibility because I am Native ... I feel a strong sense of responsibility to the community because of the younger generation.

Bringing Aboriginal culture and language into the curriculum is one of the ways they express their teacher-as-Aboriginal identity. How they use their cultural knowledge to relate to the students and to members of the community is another.

Still other ways include using their language in the staff room and hallways to express who they are, and using their experiences in the north to relate to the students. Their cultural knowledge and world view are reflected in their interactions with students, colleagues, and parents. Many of the teachers see themselves as the students' connection to the knowledge of the elders, standing between the wisdom of the past and the possibilities for the future. Their stories reveal many of these aspects of an Aboriginal view of the self that is evident in their teaching role.

Respect was one of the core values that was mentioned over and over as part of being Aboriginal. Aboriginal teachers express a deep responsibility to develop respect in their classrooms. Tina, teacher and mayor, expresses it this way:

I try to work Aboriginal values into what I do in the classroom. The biggest one is respect. When I interned I had a couple of kids in my class that really got to me and I just about threw in the towel, you know. But that was a real learning experience. The issue was respect and how those children didn't really have any respect for themselves to start off with so they really couldn't give me any. And that's the most important value as far as I am concerned ... sort of a self respect, and also getting respect by showing it to students. I notice this especially in Native Studies; some of them share their writings with me and they say they would like to learn to be more respectful.

Tina gives us a glimpse of the centrality of this value to her Aboriginal teacher identity. She promotes this value as part of Native Studies content, not as an abstract concept, but by modeling it to her students as a core Aboriginal value.

### *The Community as a Place for Language, Family, and Culture*

The community is often identified as supportive of Aboriginal teachers. Over and over these teachers identify with the life and struggles of the community. They are not only aware of the problems, but are committed to give back to the community a part of what has been given to them. The idea of giving back occurs repeatedly in the stories. "This notion of service is central to contemporary perspectives on Indian education" (MacIvor, 1995, p. 76). They are indebted to other Aboriginal people and to the community. Teaching is more than a school-centered endeavor; it is a community-centered activity. As some of the stories show, this is not always an easy way to be a teacher, but it is expected by the community.

According to many of the graduates, identifying with the community has led to a closer relationship between community and schools due to the increased attention to community perspectives. Bonnie has been teaching in her community for close to a decade and sees the connection to the culture as desired by the community.

One of the things that we have done in the last 10 years is cultural development.... I think that's one of the greatest impacts that the school had three years ago when the students from Division III went out camping for a week and lived off the land and had to do survival skills out there. The other thing is bringing our language back into the community, reviving the language, the Cree. Grades 7 to 12 are doing the Cree. So that's another impact. I think that's what the community wanted. The teachers are adapting some of the things into the curriculum that were missing. Elders can come in and do the stories.

The stories provide numerous examples of how these teachers affirm Aboriginality in others. As a school administrator in a Native community, Bonnie sees being a role model as an expectation of the community:



I think the greatest impact as a NORTEP graduate here is to be a role model for the community.... I think when teachers come from the south, the people in the community have that same expectation for them to teach the kids. But when you're from the community, the expectation is greater. They want you to take on the extra role outside of the community. They want you to be part of extracurricular activities outside of the school.

Tina, who is a mayor, also sees herself as a role model to women in the community who aspire to further their education.

I see myself as being a positive role model. I have been able to provide that by being an older woman going back to school. It's a former NORTEP graduate who was my role model, you know ... I'm glad that I did because I think a lot of the students I work with, and I would say a lot of the parents too, are in that same boat that I was in—not very confident in what they want to do. You know, they are not sure they want to go for it because they are not sure if they can make it. I'm a mother of two teenagers as well, and together with all the other things I think I am sort of living proof that things can happen. It's not so much me breaking the trail as it is helping to make the trail more accessible to other people.

Stairs (1995) notes that unlike non-Native teachers, "Native teachers identify with their communities and strive to make the school a significant part of the students' community life" (p. 147). Not surprisingly, many of the graduates are involved in local community politics. There seems to be a close relationship between teachers' work and their involvement in local politics. Other teachers see extracurricular involvement in sports and clubs as extremely beneficial to the community and an integral part of their work as teachers. In both cases their roles as teachers strive to make the school a part of community life.

### *The Land as a Place for Language, Family, and Culture*

The land and territory of northern Saskatchewan also provides a supportive environment for many of the teachers. The northern forests and lakes provide a rich context for cultural activities and curriculum topics. The history and culture of the Cree, Dene, and Metis people of northern Saskatchewan is rooted in the land. For those who have had trapline, hunting, fishing, and camping experiences, the physical geography of the north links teachers' and students' lives. Frank is an active outdoorsman and sees cultural camps as a way to connect students to their cultural heritage and its roots in the northern environment.

Every fall in September, we take all the grade nine students to a culture camp way up north—a trap line—and we do all kinds of cultural activities with them. One group took some kids and they set off and paddled all the way back here with canoes. The community has gone out of its way to have cultural camps with elders. We need to do more of this; we could take the kids over there and prepare moose and beaver hides. And all kinds of community people would be over there doing things.

It is not surprising that few teachers have left northern Saskatchewan to teach in other places. The educational, natural environment, and cultural milieu provide a place that is home to the graduates. This feeling of belonging to a specific geographical place is an important element of an Aboriginal teacher identity. School activities such as cultural camps and visits by Elders are directly connected to the surrounding environment. Without knowledge of the northern environment, these kinds of culturally related activities would take on little importance for

teachers. A teacher identity rooted in a specific geographical place is able to connect school learning with the environment and Aboriginal culture.

*Discussion:*

*Aboriginal Identity as a Guiding Narrative for Aboriginal Education*

The context for Aboriginal self-determination that has emerged in northern Saskatchewan appears to be in a dialectic relationship with the development of an Aboriginal teacher identity. This identity shapes, and in turn is shaped by, the changes to educational institutions and systems in the north that increasingly are making room for Aboriginal teachers. As Aboriginal teachers find a home in the sociopolitical and sociocultural environment of northern Saskatchewan, their identity finds its Aboriginal place.

Many of the graduates interviewed in this study seem to have an aspect of their teacher identity that is oriented toward community politics. For them school is thought to be a reflection of the community; these teachers work to link school and community in various ways. Terry is a high school teacher and also a town counselor. He comments that,

We're involving the students by letting them see the actual work because they are the next in line for this kind of stuff, so they might as well know at least what's going on. I'm bringing all my papers and all our minutes and I'm going to probably give them to the library. We have students involved as junior mayors. They come to the Town Council meetings and sit there. So we're trying to involve them that way ... I'm interested in and I'm directly involved in the power company negotiations. That's the only place that I'm involving myself; anything to do with the power company and our community. We're working towards compensation from 1929 and on, and how we can be partners with this power dam project and any future project that they do here. We're looking for partnership and revenue sharing with the dam here that generates so much profit for the province.

Several of the women in this study have broken the trail for others to follow by showing they can both raise their families and pursue teacher education. Even with those whose teaching seems to be less directly linked to local politics than in Terry's case, their stories reveal a strong determination to link the school and the community through their knowledge of Native language and culture.

Others see their involvement with students and parents in extracurricular activities as a form of community development. Frank sees this role as important to teaching in the north.

Volunteering in the community is a year-round thing; there are no breaks for me. In the fall I have the cross country running and I train them and help them stay in shape, and then I take them to the races and to the provincials. In the winter I have the ski club and then in the spring I have a little bit of a break, and then it's time to start the canoe club. I run it right through the summer until it's time to go back to school.

He talks in his story about working with the community in turning the responsibility for these activities over to them.

Some of the graduates have been directly involved in the struggle for community-controlled schools, which has heightened their political awareness of the role of school in their communities. Now a school board member, Mary, one of first graduates of the program, attributes her political awakening to such a struggle.

My sense of Aboriginality was not really well established before NORTEP. Well, it was a little bit before NORTEP, I guess during the struggle that we had in our own community when the school burned down. That had a lot of influence on me as well, that when our Native leaders in our own community said that we, as Native people, had to take control of our own education. That did a lot for me and I think that was in the back of my mind—it was what drove me to go to NORTEP.... I guess having control of our own education has made a difference. That parents can participate in the school with their children. They can go in and sit down and see what's happening and I would think that the parents should feel free to contact the teachers and talk to them about their child's progress and know what problems that they may be having. I would think that would be the main change. Before, the high school students would have to go out of their community and stay elsewhere with other families. And I think most of the time this failed because of the separation of the family. And now they are here in their own community and they are given everything that they need; then from there it's up to them.

Rediscovering Aboriginal identity often involves recovering aspects of the past that hold deep meaning for the teacher. For many that we interviewed, this process began with the awakening that took place at NORTEP. They seem to recognize that as educators they stand between the Elders and the children in the community. Several graduates talk about their relationships with various Elders as they attempt to recover what it means to be an Aboriginal person. Others are in the process of recovering their language, spiritual understandings, and cultural practices.

A part of the old narrative of colonialization involved limited choices for Aboriginal people. Many of the graduates of NORTEP were restricted to laboring jobs before entering teacher education. NORTEP has provided a door into the public service sector, which has a strong presence in the north. As the stories reveal, graduates are now employed in the health field, administration, adult education, and local politics. Teacher education has been a strategic place to prepare Aboriginal northerners for more influential participation in self-determination. One of the more politically active graduates, Tina, sees teacher education as a stepping-stone in the journey of self-determination.

I think that what's happening in Aboriginal education is that we're taking control. Right now we're not a reserve and this is not a Band school, but if you look, most of the teaching staff are of Aboriginal ancestry. So again, I think it's being able to be a role model and to be a source of hope and inspiration for the community. If the Native people can go and get educated and run the school and most of them are teachers in the school, then why can't that spring off to having the clinic run, to have the village run and to have all the businesses run by Native people. And it's really good. I think it's really positive to have Aboriginal people do this. You know, I think we're so fortunate, the kids up north as compared to the south where you have one Native teacher amongst a staff of so many. Our kids, they just have so much more of a boost to their self-esteem; here we're the majority, you know.

Aboriginal teacher identity seems inextricably connected to Aboriginal self-determination. They are involved in the process to varying degrees, from those who see their teaching as politically inscribed to those who are active politicians in the community. As in other parts of the world, NORTEP represents an example of how higher education is being used to revive and maintain cultural integrity, and exercise communal self-determination (Barnhardt, 1991).

### Conclusion

These graduates of NORTEP appear to be an integral part of change in schools in northern Saskatchewan. The many ways they approach their teaching provide possibilities for the closer integration of the school with the community and the evolution of curriculum that prepares students to live in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worlds. Their commitment to the land, the local community and Aboriginal self-determination suggests the ongoing reshaping of school systems that are more responsive to specific northern local needs and Aboriginal culture without losing sight of the need to prepare their students to participate fully in further education and the job market. This is not to suggest that there is a unified way that Aboriginal teachers see education. NORTEP graduates are living out their commitments to the people of the north in myriad ways.

Comparing northern education structures and practices as depicted in this article with those of even a decade ago suggests that Indian education is decisively shifting as it becomes more and more a place where Aboriginal teachers are common. This is more pronounced in some northern communities than in others. The increasing presence of Aboriginal teachers who have an Aboriginal identity that values Native language, cultural activities, and Native governance structures suggests that the stage has been set for the inevitable move to Indian education as "a thing of its own kind" (Hampton, 1993).

The stories of these graduates remind us that the old ways are touchstones for their identity as Aboriginal teachers, and that teacher education programs can be places that also influence Aboriginal identity that in turn shape education in new ways.

### References

- Aoki, T. (Ed.). (1990). *Voices of teaching. Monograph 1*. Vancouver, BC: British Columbia Teachers' Federation.
- Barnhardt, R. (1991). Higher education in the fourth world. *Tribal College, 3*(2), 11-26.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Carnegie, S. (1991). *Program review: Northern Teacher Education Program and Northern Professional Access College*. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Education Training and Employment.
- Carson, T. (1986). Closing the gap between research and practice: Conversation as a mode of research. *Phenomenology + Pedagogy, 4*(2), 73-85.
- Clandinin, D.J., & Connelly, F.M. (1994). Personal experience methods. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative methods* (pp. 413-427). San Francisco, CA: Sage.
- Craft, M. (Ed.). (1996). *Teacher education in plural societies: An international review*. Washington, DC: Falmer Press.
- Florio-Ruane, S. (1991). Conversation and narrative in collaborative research: An ethnography of the written literary form. In C. Witherell & N. Noddings (Eds.), *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education* (pp. 234-256). New York: Teachers College Press.
- Friesen, D.W., & Orr, J. (1995). Northern Aboriginal teachers' voices. *Monograph 1*. Saskatoon, SK: Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation.
- Friesen, D.W., & Orr, J. (1996a). *Northern Aboriginal teachers' voices: A constellation of stories*. SSTA Research Center Report No. 96-15. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan School Trustees' Association.

- Friesen, D.W., & Orr, J. (1996b). Emerging teacher role identity: Northern Aboriginal voices. In K. McLeod (Ed.), *State of the art: Multicultural research project*, 3(1). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Gale, M.A. (1996). AnTEP comes of age. *Australian Journal of Education*, 24(1), 17-25.
- Goodson, I.F. (Ed.). (1992). *Studying teachers' lives*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goodson, I.F., & Cole, A. (1993). Exploring the teachers' professional knowledge. In D. McLaughlin & W. Tierney (Eds.), *Naming silenced lives* (pp. 71-94). New York: Routledge.
- Hampton, E. (1993). Toward a redefinition of American Indian/Alaska Native education. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 20, 261-309.
- Hesch, R. (1995). Teacher education and Aboriginal opposition. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 179-207). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- Justiz, M., & Kameen, M. (1994). Assessment in higher education and the preparation of minority teachers. In M. Justiz, R. Wilson, & L. Bjork (Eds.), *Minorities in education* (pp. 286-295). Arizona: American Council on Education and Oryx Press.
- Knowles, G. (1993). Models for understanding pre-service and beginning teachers' biographies. In D. McLaughlin & W. Tierney (Eds.), *Naming silenced lives* (pp. 99-152). New York: Routledge.
- MacIvor, M. (1995). Science education for Aboriginal students. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 73-98). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- McTaggart, R. (1991). Western institutional impediments to Australian Aboriginal education. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 23(4), 297-325.
- National Indian Brotherhood. (1972). *Indian control of Indian education*. Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations.
- Northern Teacher Education Program. (1997). *Annual report*. La Ronge, SK: Author.
- Polkinghorne, D.E. (1988). *Narrative knowing and the human sciences*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press.
- Stairs, A. (1995). Learning processes and teaching roles in Native education. In M. Battiste & J. Barman (Eds.), *First nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds* (pp. 139-153). Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia Press.
- Swisher, K.G. (1995). The Haskell Indian Nations University model for elementary teacher education. *Journal of Navajo Education*, 12(3), 32-40.
- Witherell, C., & Noddings, N. (1991). *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Yonemura, M. (1982). Teacher conversations: A potential source of their own professional growth. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 12, 239-256.