

Change Makers: Empowering Ourselves Thro' the Education and Culture of Aboriginal Languages: A Collaborative Team Effort

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Background

The Native Indian Teacher Education Program (NITEP) is a University of British Columbia (UBC) Bachelor of Education Program (Elementary) guided by an advisory council of First Nations educators, UBC faculty, a representative of the British Columbia Teacher Federation, and NITEP students. NITEP builds on First Nations identity and cultural heritage while preparing and challenging persons of First Nations ancestry to be effective educators for public and band schools.

Every year a theme is selected for the NITEP newsletter, and this theme becomes the overall planning focus for the NITEP academic year. The title *Change Makers: Empowering ourselves thro' education and culture* was the selected theme for 2002-2003. This article originated from this mindset.

The article explores the collaborative team effort of a group of Aboriginal educators whose goal is to empower students by sharing personal Aboriginal language developmental experiences that reflect their culture and education pathways. They do this by identifying curriculum ideas, instructional strategies, and assessment techniques that are applicable to the NITEP First Nations Cultural Studies Education 141 course (EDUC 141). This course encompasses the study of a First Nations cultural group with an emphasis on traditional values and practices related to education. The team shares how they work toward organizing a safe learning environment and developing an Aboriginal language curriculum matrix in an Aboriginal language learning model.

The Aboriginal educators came together because they share an interest in the retention of Aboriginal languages. In this case, their interest was to incorporate an Aboriginal language into the NITEP course EDUC 141. A first informal meeting was between the NITEP director and two NITEP coordinators. The NITEP director invited other Aboriginal educators with specific specializations to participate. The Elder, Director, and a Coordinator were located in Vancouver; the other two members in Kamloops, BC and Regina, Saskatchewan. They communicated through face-to-face contact whenever possible, e-mail, and phone. Many times team collaboration was a long-distance effort.

The team's objective was to pursue students' learning goals in Aboriginal language retention in NITEP. It emphasized using a collaborative process where the educators and students would work together at practicing the best way to incorporate their lived Aboriginal language experiences and cultural expertise. The greatest need is to provide relevant education that reflects the Aboriginal world view and pedagogy. Aboriginal language curriculum development is a start.

To make a shift to a new curriculum more effective, Marie Battiste (1998) suggests "a decolonized approach to Aboriginal knowledge, language and education" in order to "defend [the] linguistic and cultural integrity" of the Aboriginal community. Because "Aboriginal languages are sacred to Aboriginal people" (pp. 16-17), they are a critical link to the knowledge of the Aboriginal community and must be given priority in the delivery of an education program.

As NITEP coordinators and students take on the role of change makers through this endeavor, they are encouraged to focus on sharing stories, experiences, and personal reflections of methods of thinking, teaching, and learning. The purpose is to advance Aboriginal language curriculum development as the students proceed through the five-year teacher education program.

The Collaborative Team

The team shares a vision to create a holistic learning pathway where the NITEP students will be given an opportunity to connect or reconnect with their Aboriginal language backgrounds. The term *pathway* is a metaphor discussed by Cajete (1994) and conveys how,

in every learning process, we metaphorically travel an internal and many times external landscape. In traveling a pathway, we make stops, encounter and overcome obstacles, recognize and interpret signs, seek answers, and follow the tracks of those entities that have something to teach us. We create ourselves anew. *Path* denotes a structure: *Way* implies a process. (p. 55)

The internal aspect Cajete (1994) refers to is the language experiences, self-knowledge, and personal inner world of the collaborative team members. The lived Aboriginal language events, memories, and challenges are the internal and external landscape that each person travels. The external refers to systems we must work with as educators. Our stories reflect a process that "begins with appropriate orientations, acknowledging relationships, setting intentions, seeking creating, understanding, sharing and then celebrating one's vision with reference to a place of centering" (p. 69). The place of centering refers to one's Aboriginal language.

The following is an introduction to the team of Aboriginal educators involved in this collaborative effort. Elders are the purveyors of the ancient ways and values of the First Nations way of life (Jules, 1999) and the knowledge imparted by them involved the "total being, the whole community, in the context of a viable living culture" (Cajete, 1994, p. 42). The

Elders are the keepers of our culture and history; they are our traditional teachers.

Jo-ann Archibald (2001) shares a good example of how one learns from the Elders. She reflects on how she learned from Elder Simon Baker, Squamish Nation, "to appreciate how stories engage us as listeners and learners to think deeply and to reflect on our actions and reactions" (p. 1). The use of the wisdom and knowledge of the Elder is an obvious benefit to the NITEP community; therefore, these introductions begin with Elder Rose Point.

Elder Rose Point

The leadership of Elders is a vital component in NITEP, which is honored to have Rose Point of the Musqueam First Nation work with our students, faculty, and staff. She offers experience, history, and first-hand knowledge of her Aboriginal language and literacy experiences. She acknowledges the responsibility of encouraging and teaching the younger generations to speak their language and to understand literacy from lived experience.

Elder Rose Point teaches through reflective experiences, examples, interactions, and public presentations. For example, she reflects on her experiences by describing the situation, the effect, and the intent for new learning gained from the experiences. She continues to guide many school boards and organizations on the retention of Aboriginal languages. Elder Rose Point encourages NITEP students and staff to use this method of pedagogy: the life experience stories.

Mary Jane Joe, NITEP Urban Centre Coordinator

Mary Jane Joe, of the Nt'ke'pmx First Nation, is the NITEP Urban Centre Coordinator. She is a resident of the Musqueam Indian reserve located on the Point Grey Peninsula next to the University Endowment Lands in Vancouver. As a First Nations educator, she is a strong supporter of Aboriginal language retention in NITEP. At present she is taking an Nt'ke'pmx language course on the Musqueam reserve to upgrade her language skills.

Mary Jane agrees with the importance of empowering ourselves through the education and culture of our Aboriginal languages. Delbert Guerin (1977), former chief of the Musqueam reserve, supports this belief. He states,

When you take a culture, attempt to take a culture and take our language away you destroy a large part of those people and it takes a while to build that up. Our people have to realize who they are. (p. 17)

Mary Jane Joe teaches the NITEP EDUC 141 course and incorporates Aboriginal language content into the course. She does this by having the student teachers research their Aboriginal language base and cultural history. Students are then required to write a term paper about Aboriginal language revitalization or how language is being promoted and preserved

in their respective Aboriginal home community. The students interview an Elder, learn about the orthography, and teach a lesson about their language.

Mary Jane's perspective is:

The most meaningful activity this term was writing four-line poems in our languages. As we listened to each other read the poems, time seemed to stand still. It was like medicine for the soul. Our languages have words that are connected to our ancestors, to our lands and the environment. These are ties to history, culture and traditions. Our words have rhythm and significance. There is meaning. We must not lose these connections. Our languages hold precious keys that can help us on our journeys. (*FNESC: Aboriginal Language Newsletter*, p. 4)

To emphasize Mary Jane's point one might consider the powerful works of Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso of Shiprock, New Mexico. She draws from the oral traditions in which she was raised—in her case, the flowing rhythms of the Beauty Way and other Navajo chants. These rhythms and traditional songs are incorporated into her work. Her poetry is rooted in the remote mesa country of the Navajo reservations. Her poems unite life's harsh realities with the harmony of vision so important to her Navajo world view. Mary Jane very effectively incorporates Aboriginal language into her class assignments through the use of poetry.

Debra Draney, NITEP Kamloops Centre Coordinator

Debra Draney is Métis (Cree, Blackfoot, French, and Scottish). Her position and role in NITEP is Coordinator for the Kamloops NITEP Field Centre. She is a member of the Cooks Ferry Band, Nlakapamux Nation, British Columbia.

It is a challenging task for all involved to work toward structuring change and action into our work and the work of NITEP as an organization. Being able to sit with our colleagues, to discuss and plan how we might assist in bringing change that will empower all, is a good starting place. Incorporating Aboriginal language and literacy into our courses is restorative because it provides a natural basis for building identity. Verna J. Kirkness (1992) reflects on how First Nations learners are encouraged to identify themselves as potential leaders and to set personal, educational, and career goals. According to Kirkness (1992), Aboriginal languages could be their choice goals.

Our ancestral ways of teaching stem from our Aboriginal languages and ways of knowing and doing. Aboriginal pedagogy, our own world view and teachings, served the needs of Aboriginal peoples for thousands of years before the arrival of a new dominant pedagogy (Ermine, 1995). "NITEP students need to learn the leadership style where one is able to 'walk in two worlds—hand and hand—hands back and hands forward!'" (McLeod, personal communication, 2002). As educators we need to plan for student success by revitalizing or reinforcing our cultural and linguistic heritage.

Past experience indicates that many NITEP students are unaware of their cultural and linguistic potential. A research assignment in the EDUC 141 course provides the students with the opportunity to learn about their own culture, history, and language. This assignment opens the eyes of many students to realize the importance of their cultural knowledge and that this knowledge can be used to further First Nations education. It is through this avenue that our student teachers become empowered to make a difference in retaining their culture and language.

Yvonne McLeod (née Anaquod), NITEP Director

I am originally from the Muscowpetung First Nation (Saskatchewan) and presently a member of the Peepeekisis First Nation (Saskatchewan). I grew up on the Muscowpetung reserve, which is a Saukteaux-speaking community, and I married into the Peepeekisis reserve, which is a Cree-speaking community, so my language background is both Saukteaux and Cree.

As I reflect on my childhood, I recall meaningful memories and experiences of hearing my Elders tell stories in both the Saukteaux and Cree languages. These are a motivation to learn, to understand, to appreciate, and to acknowledge the validity of my own history based on my own cultural traditions through language retention and promotion. I have discovered that early childhood memories stir up the ingrained knowledge of my own Aboriginal languages. As I listened to the Elders storytelling in my Aboriginal languages, it touched my whole person. Aboriginal philosophical ideas, values, and interconnectedness are also rejuvenated. When instructors and students interact in this manner, students are viewed as assets, and their cultural backgrounds become their strengths as educators (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Pewewardy, 1999). For example, I did not know the importance of my grandmother's teachings about interconnectedness to the land until it was pointed out to me that these teachings were valuable for the subjects of science and conservation. Until then I saw only the Western way of educating children. It was an empowering experience. Jo-ann Archibald (2001) speaks of my heart's desire:

the memories and accounts of the Elders give the current generation opportunity to learn and explore the *Niha7kapmx* [Aboriginal language and literacy] meanings of the stories that help develop their cultural identity and connection to the land. (p. 3)

As an educator in a higher-level institution, I realize that effective teachers bring the language and culture of their Aboriginal students into the classroom to enhance learning (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997). NITEP students learn a leadership style where one "walks in two worlds." Students are encouraged to find the balance of walking in two worlds: the modern world view and the Aboriginal world view. Students learn that the "hand and hand" relationship requires striving for a balance with our traditional ways of knowing and doing and with the Western ways of knowing and doing. They also learn to walk in leadership, which reflects the teachings and strategies of the past while looking to the future *hands back, hands*

forward philosophy. I share this vision that we will prepare students for life in the modern world without loss of their original culture (Pewewardy, 1999; Tompkins, 1998).

Rachel Clarke, Curriculum Development Specialist

Rachel Clarke is a member of the Peepeekisis First Nation in Saskatchewan. Her area of specialization is in Aboriginal youth leadership, Aboriginal early childhood education, and curriculum development. Her linguistic background is Saulteaux and Cree. Rachel's mother is Saulteaux and her father is Cree. Her husband Edward is a fluent Cree speaker from southern Saskatchewan. She does not speak fluently, but she promotes Aboriginal language retention.

As a team member Rachel reflects on cultural teachings that reinforce the value of the interconnectedness of all things in life. She agrees that "the richness of our histories and heritage provides an anchor that holds us to who we are" (Cross, 1998, p. 151). She has noticed that despite the many challenges in her students' lives, they continue to endeavor to maintain their language and culture. The memories of what is taught, told, experienced, believed, and valued shape the student's identity and voice. In this team effort Rachel explains that the change that empowers the voice of future generations begins with investigating how one incorporates an Aboriginal language into teacher education curriculum. For many Aboriginal student teachers, change involves understanding how to use the Medicine Wheel philosophy in Aboriginal curriculum development.

Rachel received a strong foundation in the use of the Medicine Wheel philosophy in curriculum development by Elder Clara Pasqua of the Pasqua First Nation in Saskatchewan. She firmly believes that the teachings of our Elders are foundational for all curriculum development. She shares the voice of her Elders through the use of certain Cree words, for example, *kisewatisowin*, which means kindness and compassion. She indicates that kindness and compassion for our future generations are the motivators for working at Aboriginal language curriculum development. What we do in Aboriginal language curriculum development will demonstrate that "kindness is healing" (W. Fox, personal communication, February 2002). Rachel points out that most Aboriginal students are going through healing and that as educators we need to be sensitive to their needs and to plan holistically. As curriculum developers we must strive to work with a good heart to bring healing to our future generations through the retention of our languages.

The Team Stories

The most important aspect of this collaborative team effort was the sharing of stories, experiences, and memories. These contributions laid the foundation for exploring curriculum development in the NITEP EDUC 141 course. This is what Cajete (1994) refers to as bringing our collabora-

tive work effort into "a place of centering." For us the centering focused on incorporating our Aboriginal languages and literacy into the course. It connected the heart and soul of each team member engaged in the curriculum development process. The following edited short version of each team member's story is presented using holistic-content analysis (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilbar, 1998).

Rose Point, NITEP Elder—Language and Culture

Language is very important. When a student enters NITEP and that student is able to speak an Aboriginal language, this is a gift to everyone. When encouraged to use their Aboriginal languages, students empower not only themselves, but others as well. A sense of pride and a deeper sense of identity are built for both the Aboriginal speaker and listener.

Let me share a story that was once told to me at a meeting.

I know a noble Indian. A hundred years ago he would have been a man, a hunter-warrior, a provider, a father, an artist, a leader, a chief. Today he is trainable mental retarded (TMR). Years ago he would have been admired for his physical and artistic qualities; he would make a natural social, cultural, and military leader in his community—maybe a Chief!

Today we continue to ask, What do we have for them?

I am concerned about students like this. What level of reading and writing do they have? Some are very capable in their Aboriginal language and culture, and they know the old people's stories. Prayer, ceremony, song, stories: these are all important. For example, we should use the Medicine Wheel in our Aboriginal curriculum planning so that we can plan for a more balanced learning path for our students.

Others, like the boy I mentioned earlier, struggled to live in a school system that did not work for him, so culture and language took second place. We need a way that will put our language and culture in first place; then our students will succeed. Today we have students who struggle with Aboriginal language, and they believe that they have no understanding of their Aboriginal language or culture. If we help them to see what they have in their hearts, then they will learn and feel good about themselves. We need to listen to one another's stories and learn from one another.

I will give you some information on the Medicine Wheel so that you can use it in your planning. The wheel (Rose Point, personal communication, 2002) represents the four elements of personal and community life: Mental/political, Emotional/social, Cultural/spiritual, and Physical/economic. The Medicine Wheel helps understand various aspects of Aboriginal language development and culture. The hub of the wheel is the ultimate goal of Aboriginal language curriculum development, and it fosters healthy individuals and communities.

Mary Jane Joe, NITEP Urban Centre Coordinator: History, Poems

As an instructor I find that it is important to create a holistic learning environment for the student teachers. They are eager to learn and tend to have success in learning about their culture, language, and Aboriginal history. I do this by incorporating Aboriginal language into our class sessions. Historically, some missionaries taught some of the First Nations peoples of BC to read and write in their languages. Reading and writing flourished until the residential schools era when Aboriginal language and literacy were not allowed. Many students relate to this in a generational way. It is up to Aboriginal people to make good decisions about their language and literacy concerns. I have been told that languages that are still passed on to the younger generation do not have to rely on the accuracy of the written form of the language in order to preserve them. But in our EDUC 141 class I try to do things holistically, so I encourage the written aspect as well.

For example, a meaningful activity for the Years 1 and 2 students was writing four-line poems. Erica Skinner (Year 1 NITEP student) is a Mi'kmaq First Nation person. The Mi'kmaq language, one of the Algonkian family of languages, is rich and descriptive. The Mi'kmaq First Nations are located in the eastern coastal region of Canada. They are distinct in their own governing system, arts and entertainment, legends and stories, and their methods of self-reliance. There are some similarities with other groups such as their teachings of the four directions, the use of sweetgrass, and the protocol of approaching an Elder.

As an example, Erica consented to share her Mi'kmaq poem. Please note: the question mark ? in the poems represents a glottal stop. The capital O represents a theta or *th* sound.

Ktaqamkuk Mulisek Kimu'j

Sipujij kutapsku'j munlink

Qaqtek kimu'j meelpaeg

Soulis kiknpegh mollyguajeck

Ktaqamkuk ahwachanjeesh kepenkeck

Keptiemege nome menisponete

Miawomi wessa mone wela'lin!

A Dancer's Prayer

From the break of dawn

Into the starry night

May many joys dance

In your heart

And may the Creator

Watch over you!

*Debra Draney, NITEP Kamloops Center Coordinator—**Incorporating What and Why?*

We hope to see the revitalization of our Aboriginal languages among students who still have the ability to speak some of their language and for those who do not speak; we hope to see them try to begin to speak. Many of our NITEP students speak English as their first language. The collaborative planning process of incorporating Aboriginal languages into the curriculum builds and creates a better understanding of one's language, culture, and identity. Through this self-awareness, this uncovering, we

will feel strong about our self-identity; that we can walk in two worlds, where we feel equally at ease because we know who we are culturally, emotionally, and spiritually. Understanding the history of our cultures and languages through NITEP cultural studies provides the opportunity to learn and to share linguistic backgrounds with our colleagues.

It is an opportunity to understand what culture and language mean to each of us individually and to come to a place of validation. Through Aboriginal language research assignments, readings, projects, and guest speakers from local Aboriginal communities, we are able to open our world even wider to come to a better understanding of ourselves and of others. Ultimately, it is acknowledging and validating that the gifts we each bring to the NITEP cohort remain everlasting and powerful. Some of us may not know our own language and traditions, but this does not make us less cultural or Aboriginal; ultimately, it is how we feel about where we are in our lives, in our worlds. The cultural studies curriculum can help us to discover and appreciate our ancestral lines, our language, our world views, and our traditional teachings.

I teach the NITEP cultural study course EDUC 141. As we work toward incorporating Aboriginal languages into EDUC 141, I find that an understanding of how the course relates to other classes in our program is needed. In the cultural studies courses, students and instructors are collaborators in the process of learning. Each follows the example of the Elder and brings a wealth of experiences and knowledge that will continue to be shared in their future professional careers. Our students will be able to pass on this tradition to future generations.

*Yvonne McLeod, NITEP Director—Aboriginal Language
and Program-Wide Student Learning*

The vision I have for student learning focuses on a goal of creating awareness of Aboriginal languages in the NITEP program. I take this approach to furthering Aboriginal language based on what Calhoun (1994) refers to as schoolwide student learning. Schoolwide learning requires a holistic focus. In our situation this holistic focus of learning requires empowering the NITEP EDUC 141 faculty and students to incorporate the education and culture of our students' Aboriginal languages. The instructors and students review Aboriginal language development continually throughout the EDUC 141 course. Opportunity (Sagor, 1992) for a collaborative team to work at identifying problems and the context of the problems, collecting information, planning action, and engaging in reflection about the results of incorporating Aboriginal language into the EDUC 141 course curriculum is the main thrust. It is a starting place!

In attempting to accomplish the incorporation of Aboriginal language, EDUC 141 instructors and student teachers work and plan toward a better understanding of their cultural identity and language potential. Their objective is to maintain a safe environment where both instructor and

student have the liberty to share generational language stories passed on by their Elders and community members. The students' goal is to work toward becoming skilled teachers by incorporating their own language experiences into their studies whenever and wherever possible. As the students accomplish this, they will understand their Aboriginal history and culture as it relates to their Aboriginal language. This too is a starting place!

In order to create a safe environment and a learning *pathway*, the following question was asked of the collaborative team members: How are we able to incorporate Aboriginal language into the NITEP program? The answer was to start with the *path* (structure) of the EDUC 141 course while working in a collaborative *way* (process) to incorporate Aboriginal languages into the curriculum.

Rationale for the EDUC 141 Course

The rationale for incorporating Aboriginal languages into this cultural studies course is to pass on our shared vision to our students such that they see themselves as a healthy, unified people proud of their culture and identity. Unless students learn about the forces that shape them, the history of their people, their values and customs, their language, they will never really know themselves or their potential as human beings (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972).

When students capture this vision they begin to pass on what they have learned about their Aboriginal language and cultural knowledge to future generations. The goal is to empower our students by providing a safe environment where they may come to realize that their Aboriginal language is the foundation of a quality education that promotes their Aboriginal culture, values, and identity.

We agree that our students have a right to understand and interact with the world in their own First Nations' language, to be nurtured by their parents, grandparents, and communities and to the teaching and guidance of their Elders (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations, 1990). Some of the strategies used to accomplish this include the following.

- We use a community-based holistic language approach: Learning *Pathway* Matrix and Medicine Wheel Model.
- We develop and use curriculum, learning experiences, Aboriginal stories, and methods that best meet our growing needs in a bicultural world: Walking in two worlds—hand and hand—hands backward, hands forward leadership approach.
- We use and collaborate with a dedicated Aboriginal team of experts: Elders, students, instructors, administrator, external curriculum experts.
- As a team we plan Aboriginal language thematic units effectively and consistently working toward implementation and evaluation using the Learning Path Matrix and Medicine Wheel Model.

- We work toward developing Aboriginal language resources, presentation materials, videos, and human resource expertise.
- We work toward creating a safe learning environment for our students so that they will mature as leaders in Aboriginal language knowledge: Celebrating success.
- We work toward maintaining relationships with community members who speak their Aboriginal language.

The Learning Pathway Matrix

The NITEP Cultural Studies EDUC 141 Course

As an Aboriginal educator I am beginning to notice the start of a documented Aboriginal knowledge system. Because this system is fragmented, we need to look for ways to improve it. In my mind, improvement begins with Aboriginal educators addressing the issue of language retention in the educational system. To do this we need to reexamine our traditional teachings and discover our understanding of what Aboriginal pedagogy is. I have been taught that the Aboriginal world view of learning is viewed holistically.

One way of doing this is to develop a matrix that reflects the holistic perspective. *Matrix* defined by Webster's dictionary refers to the "womb; the cavity where anything is formed; a mold; especially for casting printers' type" (Allee, 1983, p. 201). In my view, the present educational system does not present a holistic learning process. Lightning (1992) indicates that the learning process is described as "a process of internalization and actualization within oneself in a total way" (p. 243). This *total way* is to plan using a holistic approach. The holistic approach that this team recommends is based on the four domains of human development: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

This matrix was developed through collaborative discussions with various members of our team at different times. As the director, I had the opportunity to listen, discuss, and eventually synthesize how this approach would be with our team members. I was able to synthesize the team's ideas to formulate the matrix shown in Figure 1.

Rachel Clarke, Curriculum Development Specialist

Aboriginal language development encompasses how parents, children, and extended family members use their Aboriginal language at home and in the community. A more contemporary approach with Aboriginal holistic thinking is recommended by Elder Rose Point, a member of our collaborative team. This approach includes the Aboriginal world view that each individual develops holistically. Educators may support this development by planning for growth in each of the four Medicine Wheel domains: mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual.

This change process requires the development of critical consciousness: a pedagogical approach that centers on the student's experiences and

Change Makers: Empowering Ourselves Thro' the Education and Culture of Aboriginal Languages (McLeod, 2002, Matrix in progress)

Vision: Students and instructors envision themselves as healthy unified Aboriginal people who are proud of their culture and identity and realize their potential to pass this knowledge on to future generations in a bicultural world.

Goal: to create a student learning path in which both the students and instructors work toward Aboriginal language retention as a foundation that will promote Aboriginal culture, values, and identity.

Four Domain Objectives:

- **Emotional Domain:** to increase one's pride by becoming aware of one's Aboriginal language identity
- **Spiritual Domain:** to develop an appreciation and respect for oneself, one's family, and one's community by involvement in Aboriginal ways of knowing that centre on spirituality
- **Physical Domain:** to develop Aboriginal language acquisition, knowledge, and understanding about how one uses and connects to one's Aboriginal language on a regular basis
- **Mental Domain:** to increase the use of one's Aboriginal language by incorporating

Learners/ NITEP Students

1. Current Student Language Background

- Family history
- Stories
- Community connections
- Other evaluations
- Consensus: Students not prepared and lack confidence in this area

2. Student performance and response we would like to see

- Medicine Wheel Evaluation Format
- Elder interaction
- Other evaluations to be developed

3. Student/Learners External Information:

- Aboriginal language and literacy research
- National, Provincial, Language and Literacy Reports
- Other

Learning Environment/ NITEP

4. Information about the current NITEP learning environment

- No Aboriginal language and literacy specific courses
- Instructor strategies
- other

5. Learning Environment External Information

- Aboriginal language and literacy research
- National, Provincial, Aboriginal Reports
- Other

6. WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE!

- Increased student/staff professional development in Aboriginal languages and literacy
- Increased student access to Aboriginal languages and literacy resources and resource people
- Student access to Aboriginal language and literacy tutors
- Develop a language and literacy courses specific to learner and educator needs
- Aboriginal language and literacy units and lesson plans First Nation
- Curriculum development strategies for incorporating "baby steps" Aboriginal language and literacy
- Aboriginal input into curriculum development
- Elder and student involvement through out process
- Awareness of Aboriginal Culture and Principles
- Other—ongoing collaborative team development, strategic plan focus.

Figure 1.

cultures. Mary Jane Joe demonstrated this by having her students write poems in their languages based on their language experiences and culture.

Teaching Suggestions

Teacher preparation for an Aboriginal language unit might include consideration of the four domains, student learning through interaction, student self-evaluation, and personal adaptation of the unit to fit each unique classroom situation. It is also important to understand the Aboriginal content that relates to the students' linguistic background.

Student Learning Through Interaction

The activities of this unit may be planned and structured such that the students will practice their Aboriginal language communication skills. The sequence of these activities will allow students to practice giving and receiving feedback from their peers, family, and instructor.

Self-Evaluation

It is important for students to be able to evaluate themselves and plan for better communication, social interaction, and development of personal relationships as they experiment with their language. A response journal could also be used as a personal evaluation for time spent and personal reflection on their comfort level in using their language. Students could also use the response journal for conversations or a situation that they may wish to learn from.

The Four Domains

The principal idea of the Medicine Wheel is that an individual is a whole with four parts: mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional. For an person to be complete or whole, all four components must be supported.

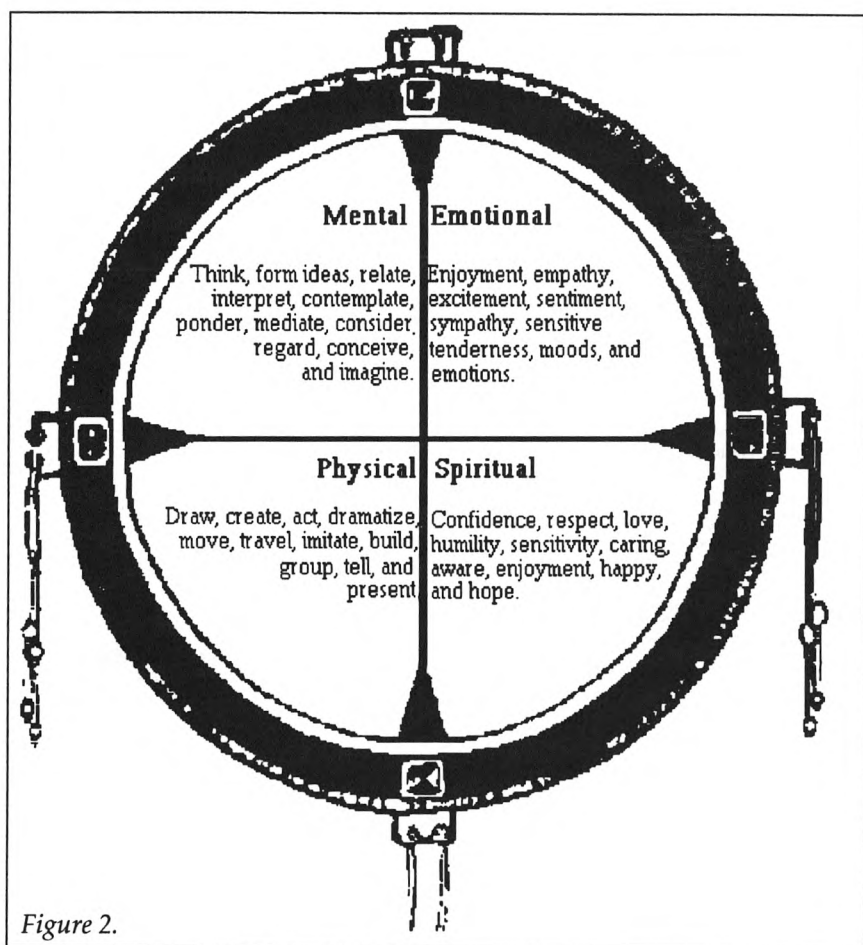
Adaptations

Although it is important to adapt the objectives of the unit for each specific course, it is also vital to maintain the accuracy of the culturally specific information about the Aboriginal students. Figure 2 shows some words that may help in writing and choosing objectives for the domains.

The course objectives for the cultural studies course unit are to introduce educators to various aspects of Aboriginal knowledge and values reflected in Aboriginal language and cultures that can assist with designing culturally appropriate education for Aboriginal students.

Figure 3 is a model that takes into consideration the Aboriginal view as applied to language instruction in a sociocultural approach to supporting Aboriginal language development.

In the physical domain, planning and organization ensure that a supportive language environment with family and friends in mind is accommodated by the instructor and the learner. Incorporating many diverse styles and strategies that will allow for language growth and development



are vital to this model. For example, the student's poem represents much more than a hard copy of a written poem. Time, research, communications, and social interactions are ongoing. Social interactions with extended family allow for validation of the experience. Student teachers share their social interaction stories. When this validation occurs, realistic reactions and interactions take place in the experience that allow for a better appreciation of oneself and one's language connections.

In the emotional domain it is expected that a desire for language will be fostered and will grow. Students' and instructors' modeling of optimism and confidence is an important aspect of understanding the importance of language acquisition. The students' enthusiasm for new language learning teaches that the Aboriginal language development is intrinsically rewarding.

The mental domain emphasizes that language is important and has many purposes. Language allows for building a knowledge base and for a

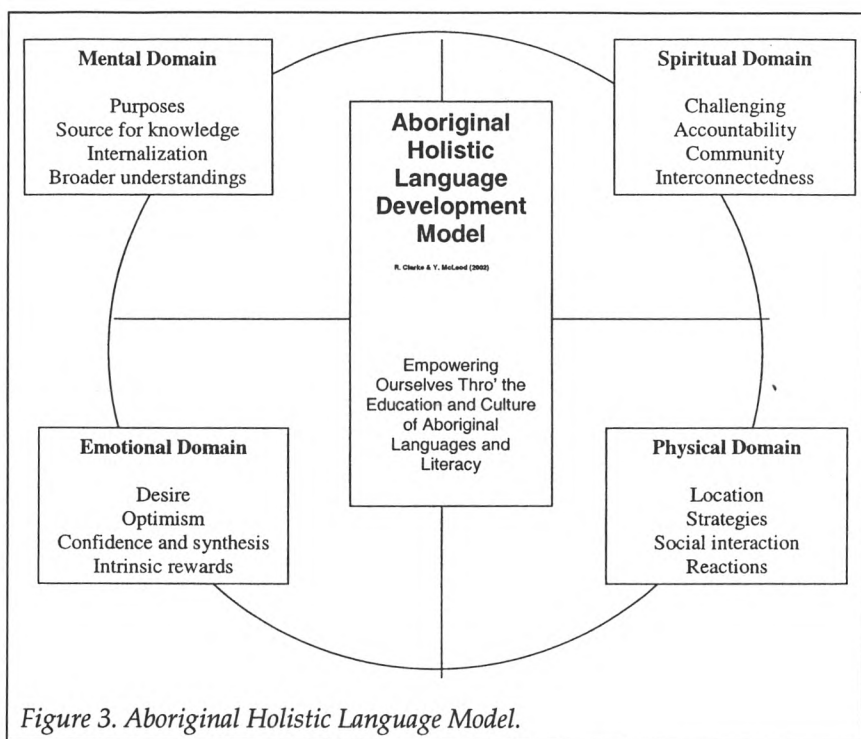


Figure 3. *Aboriginal Holistic Language Model.*

broader understanding of one's history and culture. Once this base is built, there is room to internalize the associated skills and concepts for acquiring a language. The important point is that the student and instructor value the Aboriginal language.

The spiritual domain supports the principles of the Aboriginal family, their associated values and world view. There is an expectation of continual challenge to share family language stories and Aboriginal language development. This may be accomplished by a classroom family approach of encouraging language development. This will ensure commitment and accountability to the classroom family and community language growth. The interconnectedness aspect of the Aboriginal family language approach affects growth in other areas too. When this model is applied holistically, students will ensure development of their own language. It can be slow, but it is worthwhile.

NITEP Students: Working as Partners

Students make the difference! When educators allow themselves to sit back and listen to the voices of their students, good things happen. This is probably the most valuable part of this collaborative process. The students were empowered as shown by their enthusiasm in doing the class language research project in Mary Jane Joe's class. Their completed work

reflected their keen interest to learn about their linguistic backgrounds and to write poems in their Aboriginal languages.

The poem by the NITEP student Erica Skinner of the Mi'kmaq First Nation makes references to the energy that a student puts into incorporating Aboriginal language into the curriculum. Figure 4, a lesson on Mi'kmaq literacy, helps visualize the professional development that occurs in a student's life.

Having moved through this process with their NITEP students, the instructors can more easily see where the students may have problems understanding and carrying out the language tasks. The learning community extends beyond the class. Instructors and students communicate through electronic mail with their family, friends, and instructor. They share their reflections, literacy stories, and language development. Their reflections inform the discussion for the next conversation, whether it is in the hall, in the institution, or at home.

Students are confident in being able to contribute interactively because their instructor became a learner with them. An instructor experiencing language lessons with his or her students receives a clearer picture of the students' needs. It enables both the NITEP students and the instructor to have a better sense of success as they work together. It becomes an enjoyable learning experience in a safe environment.

Effect

In retrospect, one wonders, What role and function does reading and writing the Aboriginal language have in the context of reviving and teaching it? Perhaps an Aboriginal language can enhance English-language literacy skills. Learning to read and write an Aboriginal language does not make it harder for our students to read and write English. The practical advantage of communicating in one's Aboriginal language and sharing one's Aboriginal language experiences results in better communication. The learning experiences enhance their skills for teaching, researching, writing curriculum, and developing language resources.

Members of this collaborative team agreed that reading and writing one's Aboriginal language allows for successful experiences in the four domains of the Medicine Wheel: emotionally high, mentally keen, physically adept to write, and spiritually at one with self. Most important, the results of this process raise the status of Aboriginal languages in the minds of our students, instructors, communities, and in non-Native society. After all, the NITEP students have to walk in two worlds.

This structure and process has taught both students and instructors that there is an important starting place. This is sharing one's Aboriginal language experiences and stories. Writing words that one hears from Elders, friends, and family so that they can later be memorized in a safe environment created by the instructor is also important. Writing is a mnemonic device. Being able to jot down quickly a new word that is heard

ORACY

LESSON ONE - SPEAKING - (JIGSAW GROUP PRESENTATIONS)

Learning Objectives:

1. The students will be able to develop ways to present information to their peers.
2. The students will be able to speak and listen in a supportive environment.

Activity:

Each group will have one or two Mi'kmaq heroes or role models to read about. The accomplishments of the Hero/Role model will be summarized and presented to the small group later.

The students from the home topic groups will take the information of their topic and break into jigsaw co-op groups. The students will hear about heroes and role models in a secure smaller environment.

Instructional Approach Used:

Indirect Instruction:

- discovery
- guided inquiry
- composing

Common Essential learnings Involved:

Personal and Social Values and Skills

Communication

Creative and Critical Thinking

Mi'kmaq Content:

Information from notes will be presented to the other students. The reinforcement of hearing information from peers about the Mi'kmaq culture will create a positive awareness among the students. The discussion will be monitored and guided by the teacher.

Materials and Resources:

Micmac Peoples of the Maritimes by Stephen Davis

Outline for anecdotal records for students to see how they will be evaluated

"Share the Dream" Posters and Booklet

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Figure 4.

or a word that is presented with humor is not easily forgotten. Follow-up could involve researching the word or words or one's family language history.

An Ongoing Issue

The most obvious issue remains one of the adequacy of available resources. This collaborative team focused on Aboriginal language curriculum development as they attempted to learn their languages. The result was a limited vocabulary and simple declarative sentences. The ongoing result is found in forming networking opportunities for instructors and the continuing work of developing curriculum resources on the fly by the students and instructors. This is challenge and a work in progress.

Conclusions

Five key objectives guide the design of the NITEP course presentation:

- to provide the ongoing developmental practice of student Aboriginal languages;
- to encourage the use of holistic pedagogy by sharing common language experiences, stories, and poems;
- to continue course development that builds and supports the Aboriginal students who are first-time to minimal language learners;
- to encourage students' language acquisition and practice;
- to research one's linguistic background and cultural history.

The result of this collaborative endeavor has proved fruitful. It has provided the opportunity to present a NITEP cultural studies course in an Aboriginal language. Participants were able to share common experiences and provide mutual support throughout the process and structure of the course. Both the students and the instructors became facilitators of holistic learning. Language issues were used as the bridge for required research readings. The Aboriginal language learners, whether first-time or minimal learners of their language, were well supported. The blending of students' and instructors' language experiences and stories reflects an expertise that is normally not noticed or acknowledged. Sharing from an Aboriginal language perspective takes on added meaning. But most important, the team shares of themselves: their thoughts, ideas, concerns, and frustrations. This sharing lays the foundation for the ongoing development of a true Aboriginal language learning community.

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