

Attributes of teachers and schools ■ that promote educational success for Aboriginal Students

Theresa (Therri) Papp, Ph.D. Candidate
Education Administration



Who am I?

Purpose

To identify **what teachers do** in the classroom and **how teachers create** a learning environment that is conducive to educational success.

Why is this research important?

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)
- Close the gap in education and employment
- SK graduation rate for Aboriginal students 32.5%
(Pelletier, Cottrell, & Hardie, 2013, p. 13)
- Education impacts earnings (Howe, 2006; Steeves, Carr-Stewart & Marshall, 2010)
- Aboriginal populations fastest growing youth population (Howe, 2006)
- Combining theory and practice: *How to – A conceptual model*

Research Questions

- 1. How do teachers perceive current innovative practices that assist in animating the conditions that foster equitable outcomes for high school Aboriginal students through the public education in Saskatchewan?
- 2. What teaching strategies have these teachers implemented in the classroom that they perceive to have resulted in student engagement and achievement?

Caveats and Definitions

- Panacea
- Terminology
- Wholistic
- Success
 - a) Assessment for Learning (AFL)
 - b) Elders
 - c) Verna Kirkness (1998) “. . . when your children are enjoying the challenge of school/learning, when their self-esteem and self-confidence are evident, when your children are proud of who they are, when their links with the older generations are made” (p. 15).

Delimitations: Controlled factors

- Case study
- Teacher perspective
- Criteria: Teach minimum of one year at school
- Qualitative design

Limitations

- Sole researcher
- Case study
- Sample size
- Education research is interdisciplinary

Research Design

- Qualitative
- **Participant voices** (Acoose, Blunderfield, Dell, & Desjarlais, 2009; Kovach, 2009; 2010; Torrance, 2011; Wilson, 2001)
- **Relationship-based, conversational** (Aboriginal worldview)
- **Constructivist Paradigm** (Kuhn, 1970; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011)
- **Grounded theory** (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2011)

Site Selection

- Extreme case
- Unique case
- Assessment for Learning (AFL) improvements
- Increased credits
- Increased graduation rates (3-55 in five years)
- Increased attendance
- Approval and ethics approval

Participant selection and Interviews

- Purposeful selection
- Snowball
- Willing to share
- 7 total – 1 administrator/2 admin-teachers/4 teachers
- 2 female/5 male 3 self-identified Aboriginal
- One to two hours/interview
- Rich details
- Transcription

Sample questions

- Education background, length of time at school, previous teaching experience, influencers to teach at school, past experience with Aboriginal students, preparation and support
- What pedagogical approaches work well to engage students and improve learning
- Describe your relationship with students
- Indicators of well-being and student success
- Impact of culture on student learning

Coding and Data Analysis

- *In Vivo* style (within the living)
- Voice of the participant
- Gerunds representing actions of the participants
- Grounded theory approach: coding for actions (Charmaz, 2011)
- Considered Indigenous coding: honor the participant's **voice** (Saldana, 2013)
- Numerous cycles of data analysis

Themes – The Findings

- Relationships
- Teacher support
- Student support
- Teacher traits
- School environment
- Pedagogical approach
- Culture

The Foundation

Relationships

“More about building those relationships and getting to know one another than it is about the science [the subject being taught] that we are going to do in class - Spend time getting to know each other first before class work.”

■ “Student first – then teach”

“Miyo-wicehtowin is a Cree word meaning ‘having or possessing good relations’. It is a concept that arises from one of the core doctrines or values of the Cree Nation . . . Create positive or good relations in all relationships, be it individually or collectively with other peoples.”

(Cardinal & Hildebrandt, 2000, p. 14)

Relationship Building

- Reciprocated Trust and Respect
- Accepting of student
- Value
 - Student as a person
 - Students' ideas
 - Students' culture
 - Students' families
- Relationship is foundation to successful pedagogy

(Bergstrom et al., 2003; Bishop et al., 2014; Haig-Brown et al., 1997; Hare & Pidgeon, 2011; Hattie, 2009; Kanu, 2002; Preston & Clayborn, 2013; Papp, 2016; Silver et al., 2002)

The Four “R” Values

- Respect
- Relevance
- Reciprocity
- Responsibility

“... The need for an educational system that **respects** them for who they are, that is **relevant** to their view of the world, that offers **reciprocity** in their relationships with others and that helps them exercise **responsibility** over their own lives” (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 1)

Relationship building

- Personal level of communication (not superficial)
- First name basis
- Accepting of student
- Genuinely care and value student (ideas, family, culture, time)
- Equality, Dignity and Mutual respect reciprocated
- Non-heirarchical
- Sharing Circles – Sharing of teachers' life, emotions, struggles (humanness)

Relationship: The Four Domains

- Socioemotional
- Spiritual
- Physical
- Intellectual

Socioemotional

- Group work
 - Shared ownership and leadership
 - Student centered topics
 - Trust
 - Respect
 - Relationship: Teacher sharing/Students sharing in circle
- 4 R's: Respect, relevance, reciprocity of relationships, responsibility of learning and lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 1)

Spiritual

- Respect for culture
- Sense of identity and purpose
- Relationship between teacher-student and student-student supporting growth
- Support and celebrate culture together

4 R's: Respect, relevance, reciprocity of relationships, responsibility of learning and lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 1)

Physical

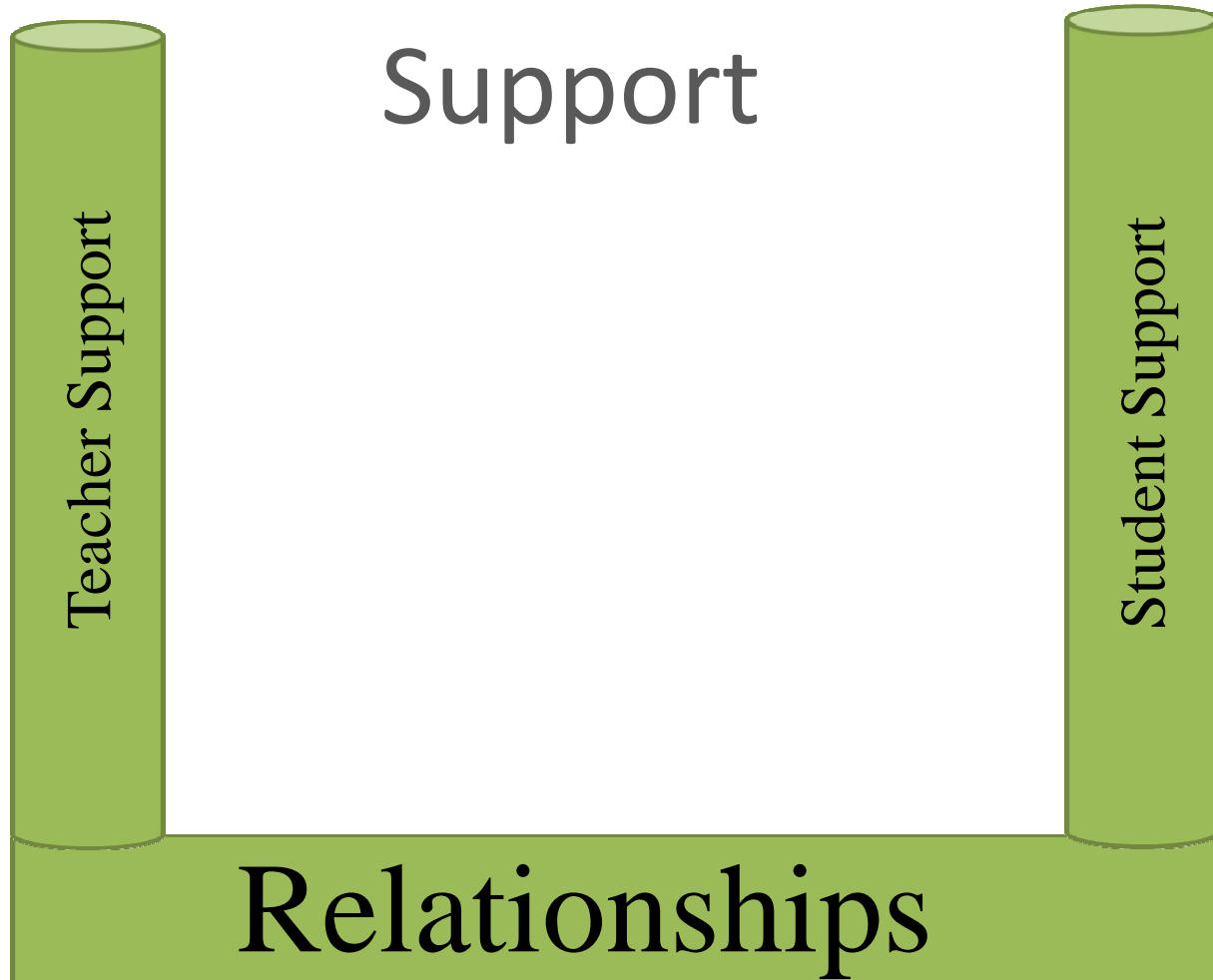
- Meeting basic needs
 - Food, shelter, support
- Belonging
- Sense of place and family
- Safety
- Alleviate stress: Styles of assessment and teaching styles

4 R's: Respect, relevance, reciprocity of relationships, responsibility of learning and lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 1)

Intellectual

- Student centered and student paced
- Sense of community within learning
- Connect curriculum with interests and culture
- Safety for success
- Building self-esteem
- Pedagogy styles incorporated to engage students

4 R's: Respect, relevance, reciprocity of relationships,
responsibility of learning and lives (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991, p. 1)



Student Supports: Removing Barriers

- Welcoming: The Door was always open
- Breakfast and Lunch Program
- Housing and Transportation
- Daycare
- Counsellors and social workers
- Income Assistance and program facilitators
- Spiritual and cultural leaders: Ceremony


Teacher supports

- Administrative leadership
- Shared leadership and delegation of responsibilities
- Encouraged to try new things
- Absence of hierarchy
- Co-planning, co-teaching
- Comradery

Teacher Supports

■ Professional Development

- Co-constructing professional development (PD)
- Weekly staff meetings focused on pedagogy
- Book studies
- Tech Tuesday
- Sharing
- What is working/what is not working
- Support to attend workshops and seminars
- Mandated to incorporate inquiry-, project-, problem-based learning pedagogy for one unit.



**Onus on the teacher for
students to succeed**

School Environment and Social System

- Positive Experience
 - Positive and always welcoming
 - Less institution, less formal
 - Positive communication
 - Physical and social safety
 - No hierarchy
 - Sense of community, family, belonging

School Environment

- School Structure
 - Credit recovery
 - Block system (2 hours am and pm for 9-10 weeks)
 - Public acknowledgement
 - Dual credits
 - Not failed, “not yet”
 - Teacher continuity

School Environment

- Physical Learning Space
 - Small size school (250 student capacity)
 - Culturally immersed
 - Learning space comfortable; less structured
 - Soft lighting
 - Round tables and couches
 - No rules
 - Comfortable for students
 - Coffee, tea, snacks

Culturally Affirming

- Respected and valued Aboriginal culture
- Daily cultural experience
- Affirmed identity as an Aboriginal person
- Majority of students Aboriginal
- Teacher participation in ceremony
- Students' teaching their children about culture
- Culture incorporated into curriculum

Culturally Affirming

- Ceremony: Daily smudge, drumming, monthly men and women's' circles, sharing circle, round dance, feasts, pow wow
- Ceremony: Sense of family, belonging, self-esteem, sense of identity
- Four domains are interconnected: Socioemotional, Spiritual, Intellectual, Physical

Pedagogical Approach

- Relational pedagogy
 - Connect the classwork to the students' life, concerns, interests
 - Student directed (their ideas)
 - Student paced
 - Working together in groups
 - Meaningful work projects
 - Partnering with community
 - Facebook
 - Value students time

Pedagogical Approach

- Student-Centered Pedagogy
 - Inquiry-based
 - Discussion-based
 - Problem-based
 - Project-based learning approach
- Anything BUT transmission learning
- Variety of assessment – formative, oral, constant
- Teacher at student level and moving to each student
- Culture

Shift the Pedagogical dial

Teacher style; Instruction style: Anything BUT transmission

“Once it happened [changed teaching style] it is like they [the students] came alive. This blossoming of ideas and thinking and creativity and voice.”

Teacher traits

▪ Personality Traits

- Seeking a challenge
- Open to new teaching approaches
- Passionate about their subject and teaching
- Open minded and flexible
- Risk takers
- Able to relate to students
- Aspire for self-improvement
- Non-judgmental; create safety for students

Teacher Traits

- Relational Traits
 - Emotionally present
 - Personable
 - Genuinely care
 - Awareness and acknowledge student challenges
 - Engage in real conversation
 - Interested and invested in student success
 - Respectful of students
 - Able to relinquish power

Teacher Traits

- Cultural Responsiveness
 - Open to Aboriginal culture
 - Open to Aboriginal people
 - Educated or knowledge of Aboriginal culture and history
 - Acknowledge Aboriginal perspective
 - Learning from Elders and community
 - Respect for Aboriginal tradition and ceremony
- Non-judgmental; student safety

Teacher traits

- Curriculum delivery
 - Allow student directive
 - Share democratic leadership
 - Able to relinquish power
 - Inspire
 - Creativity
 - Experiential nature
 - Teaching from the heart

Administration and Parent Council

- Initiated renewal and reassessment
- School success: Cultural, healing, community
- Drew students but no credits or graduation
- School administrators mandated to students' academic success
- Admin focus on teachers and classroom experience
- Wholistic approach to success

It is what is happening in their learning environment for them every day in the classroom. And so that is where the energy went and the focus went

Themes in Review - Findings

- Relationships
- Teacher support
- Student support
- Teacher traits
- School environment
- Pedagogical approach
- Culture



Questions?

 **Thank you!**

the.papp@sasktel.net

References

- Acoose, S., Blunderfield, D., Dell, C. A., & Desjarlais, V. (2009). Beginning with our voices: How the experiential stories of First Nations women contribute to a national research project. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 4(2), 35-43.
- Cardinal, H., & Hildebrandt, W. (2000). *Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan*. Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press.
- Charmaz, K. (2011). Grounded theory methods in social justice research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th ed., pp. 359-380). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory*. Chicago, IL: Aldine Publishing.
- Howe, E. C. (2006). Saskatchewan with an Aboriginal majority: Education and entrepreneurship. Saskatoon, SK: University of Saskatchewan.
- Kirkness, V. J., & Barnhardt, R. (1991). First Nations and higher education: The four R's – respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility. *Journal of American Indian Education* 30(3), 1-15.
- Kirkness, V. J. (1998). Our peoples' education: Cut the shackles; Cut the crap; Cut the mustard. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 22(1), 10-16.
- Kovach, M. (2009). *Indigenous methodologies: Characteristics, conversations, and contexts*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Kovach, M. (2010). Conversational method in Indigenous research. *First Peoples Child & Family Review* 5(1), 40-48.
- Pelletier, T., Cottrell, M., & Hardie, R. (2013). *Improving education and employment outcomes for First Nations and Metis People*. Saskatoon, SK: Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit.
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Steeves, L. E., Carr-Stewart, S., & Marshall, J. (2010). Aboriginal student education attainment: A Saskatchewan perspective. *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundations* (21)2, 19-34.
- Torrance, H. (2011). Qualitative research, science, and government: Evidence, criteria, policy and politics. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.) *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*, (4th ed., pp. 569-580). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- Wilson, S. (2001). What is Indigenous research methodology? *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 25(2), 175-179.