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# Perspectives on Teachers' Work in One Ontario Remote First Nation Community

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## Abstract

The nature of teachers' work in one northern Ontario remote First Nation community is explored through three articles that address the following questions: Why do teachers work in the North? What contributes to teacher retention and attrition? And, how do teachers navigate the professional and personal boundaries of their lives as teachers in the North?

The articles are based on a case study of teachers' work in one community and use data collected through interviews with 15 non-local teachers, focus groups with subsets of those teachers, and observations collected as field notes. Article 1, *Teacher attrition in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community: A narrative re-storying*, explores the shared experiences of teachers as they discuss the professional and personal factors that contribute to their retention and attrition. Article 2, *Teaching and fear: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, unpacks how the emotion of fear mediates teachers' experiences within a colonizing system. Article 3, *Understanding roles and relationships: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, explains how teachers negotiate their roles and relationships with students, other teachers, families, and the community and uses the heuristic categories of pedestal people, transitioners, relationship builders and community integrators to explore the range of approaches teachers employ.

Although the focus of each article is distinct, the general nature of teachers' work was found to be deeply marked by complexity because of the relational conditions of their work. To be understood, the work of teachers must be positioned within discourses

of power, colonization, the ongoing legacy of residential schools, and current decolonizing efforts.

Practice-based policy suggestions such as mentorship and orientation programming, professional learning circles, and community-based activities are made to address challenges identified by the research. In addition, calls for equitable funding, continuing or multi-year teacher contracts, and improved teacher education are identified as necessary to address systemic concerns.

**Keywords:** teachers' work, First Nations schools, teacher attrition, teacher fears, Indigenous education

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Study after study demonstrates the pressing need to improve the educational achievements and experiences of First Nations students (Assembly of First Nations, 2012; Auditor General of Canada, 2000; Canadian Council on Learning, 2009; Richards 2008; Richards & Scott, 2009). Policies such as the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007) recommend culturally relevant teaching strategies and varied pedagogical approaches to improve achievement of Aboriginal students and the Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE) *Accord on Indigenous Education* (2010) emphasizes the centrality of improved teacher education. These approaches make sense given that the research literature shows a strong correlation between student success and effective teaching and teacher quality (Chell, Steeves, & Sackney, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rowe, 2007). Furthermore, stability in the teaching force is important because teacher attrition has a negative outcome for students by compromising trust and disrupting school dynamics (York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007). It can be concluded, then, that student success and the implementation of social policies targeted at Aboriginal students converge in the work of teachers. Surprisingly, however, there is too little research exploring the role of teachers and their work in Aboriginal education, particularly from the perspective of teachers themselves. This creates a significant gap in understanding the challenges facing First Nations education, particularly in northern communities.

Teaching in the North occurs within a complex dynamic of federal, provincial, and local requirements and expectations. This, along with geographic isolation and a cross-cultural teaching environment, creates a deeply contextual and heavily politicized

site of teaching. The ways in which this site of teaching is navigated *in* and *through* the work of teachers is the focus for this integrated-article dissertation.

### **Research Questions**

The overarching research question guiding this study was: What is the nature of teachers' work in a remote First Nation community in Northern Ontario? Three sub-questions more specifically asked:

1. Why do teachers work in the North?
2. What contributes to teacher retention and attrition?
3. How do teachers navigate the professional and personal boundaries of their lives as teachers in the North?

### **Literature Review**

My research on teachers' work in the North is informed by a literature that deals with teachers' work more generally and by a smaller literature that explores teaching work in Aboriginal contexts.

A large volume of research that spans the last 40 years has attended to issues of teachers' work and covers topics such as teachers' official capacities, teaching realities, roles and expectations, professional lives and careers, teacher behavior, demographics, teacher control and intensification. Much of this work can be traced back to the seminal book, *Schoolteacher*, written by Dan C. Lortie in 1975. Lortie introduced teachers' work as a cohesive experience grounded in time, space and greater political discourses that expose and examine the ethos of the occupation (Lortie, 1975). Recruitment, socialization, motivations and goals are all discussed by Lortie with an increased focus on

not only what teachers do in their work but the meaning behind why they do it. Much of the research on teachers' work since 1975 has been developments and continuations of concepts introduced by Lortie in *Schoolteacher*.

Prior to Lortie's *Schoolteacher* there was a functionalist approach to research on teachers' work. During the 1950's and 1960's features of teaching as an occupation were heavily researched, in particular the role of female teachers. As women provided continuity between home and early years of school, it was argued that their duality would ease the transition from home to school environments for children (Parsons, 1961). However, the functionalist discourse of professionalism also scapegoated women as the root cause for the failure of teaching to reach the standard of a profession (Acker, 1995). Standards, supervision and control were heavily researched in an attempt, as functionalists argued, to allow teaching professionals "the high status and rewards in exchange for their important social contributions" (Tabakin & Densmore, 1986, p. 258).

Research on teachers' work appearing since Lortie's *Schoolteacher* can be categorized by two additional approaches; 1) interactionist approaches, and 2) critical approaches. The work subsumed in these approaches deals with a wide variety of topics around teachers' work such as roles, responsibilities, characteristics, dispositions, teacher satisfaction, motivation, working conditions, the work and lives of teachers, as well as agency, autonomy, and control. Interactionist and critical approaches help to position teachers' work in modes of either reproduction or production, and this is what becomes useful in how the literature contributes to an understanding of teachers' work in remote First Nation communities.



The first approach, an interactionist approach to research on teachers' work, is focused on behavior and "how members of occupations operate pragmatically and survive amid conflicting pressures in the everyday performance of their work" (Atkinson, 1983, p. 227). One body of literature that takes up this approach is centered on the roles, responsibilities and characteristics of teachers and teaching. The roles of teachers and their associated responsibilities have been commonly studied and findings indicate that teachers are affected not only by the expectations, rights and responsibilities that dictated their work but also by other invested stakeholders such as parents, school administrators, and school board trustees (Acker, 1999; Huberman, 1993). Additionally, teacher identities, subcultures, commitments, satisfaction, careers and the lives of teachers were studied through a symbolic interactionist approach that highlighted the individual but this approach was criticized for not acknowledging the systemic and structural role of power (Ball, 1987; Hargreaves, 1994; Woods, 1983). This prompted the growth of research from a conflict or critical approach and focused on teachers' work outside and beyond the site of school to acknowledge the structural and systemic impacts on and of teachers' work (Biddle, Good, & Goodson, 1997).

A critical or conflict approach to research on teachers' work draws on modes of production rather than on modes of reproduction more commonly associated with an interactionist approach. This approach, taken most recently in the literature on teachers' work, is particularly relevant to my inquiry and bridges two prominent discourses. First, research about teachers as labourers and agents of change is informed by perspectives on social justice, autonomy and agency. This approach positions my research within a greater discourse of equity and accounts for the social dimension of race, class and

power. The social and political context represented in this body of literature is essential to understanding the work of teachers specifically in remote First Nation communities.

Second, the voice of the teacher becomes central in this approach and complements the research addressing greater structural and systemic issues. The teacher as an autonomous being, able to challenge social reproduction rather than be a passive agent shaped by the system they work in, is the focus of much discussion in the literature. This focus is achieved through narrative, life history and autobiographical research that demonstrates the everyday realities of teachers' work and lives and encourages teacher autonomy and more engagement with the social and moral purposes of education (Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Weiler, 1988; Casey, 1993). This approach places teachers' work within a neoliberal and global agenda and has dictated much of the more recent writing on teacher control and teaching as labour (Robertson, 2000; Smyth, 2001; Apple, 1993).

These bodies of literature represent the approaches that have been taken to research teachers' work and the last decade of research has extended and expanded ideas of control and educational reform set within a global and neoliberal landscape (Robertson, 2000). A knowledge economy and the neo-liberal agenda have impacted the overall direction of educational reform and has newly dictated not only what but how teachers teach (Smyth, 2001). As part of the literature on education control and reform, the discussion around the intensification of teachers' work has highlighted the increased workload assumed by teachers while also pointing to compromised social relationships (Robertson, 2000; Smyth, 2001; Wotherspoon, 2006).

The approaches detailed above represent a generalized overview of recent literature about teachers' work and point to a significant void in the literature that does not capture the nature of teachers' work in First Nation communities, particularly remote communities. Two studies by Wotherspoon (2006, 2008) deal directly with teachers' work in Aboriginal communities. Contributing to the recent literature on neoliberalism and educational reform, the focus of these studies is on the intensification of teachers' work and how those points of intensification are in contradiction to the needs of schools in Aboriginal communities.

Very few studies have maintained a focus on Aboriginal teachers either teaching in their home community or in neighbouring communities, but those studies that have focused on Aboriginal teachers' experiences contribute to an understanding of the historical and cultural contexts that dictate teacher experiences (Cherubini, 2008; St. Denis, 2010; Wimmer, Legare, Arcand, & Cottrell, 2009). The work of Helen Harper focuses on women teachers and their early careers in northern Ontario and the territories to show how teachers are facing difficult challenges because the demands of their employment are beyond the scope of the preparation offered by their teacher education programs (Harper, 2000a, 2000b, 2004; Heslop, 2003). The focus of other studies also has been on the careers of beginning teachers who are also new to the working world as recent graduates of university programs (McAlpine & Crago, 1995; Shockey, 2000; Wimmer, Legare, Arcand & Cottrell, 2009). This work examines the realities of teaching, often describing the issues faced by teachers such as budget cutbacks, unsuitable curricular expectations, public disputes and differing perceptions of teaching found within Aboriginal contexts. These important, although largely descriptive, accounts of

teachers in rural, remote, and isolated First Nation communities outline the tensions, challenges, and struggles teachers contend with (Cherubini, 2008; Harper, 2000a, 2000b; McAlpine & Crago, 1995; Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011) and also illustrate that the literature on teachers' work has tended to focus only on the school as the site of teachers' work.

Relationships are often mentioned in research about teachers' work in First Nation communities (Anderson 2004; Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003). Teacher interaction, connection, involvement and participation are often alluded to as important experiences that contribute to teacher attitudes, perceptions and retention but research focused on these issues is underrepresented in the literature (Wotherspoon, 2006, 2008). Community and teacher relations are also explored in the literature through the tensions and challenges teachers face as they work to understand their role in the greater community beyond the bounds of school (Anderson, 2004; Harper, 2000a; Wimmer, Legare, Arcand, & Cottrell, 2009).

The site of the school, in the Canadian Aboriginal context, has resulted in a large body of work focused on curriculum, culturally responsive programming, student engagement, workload, time compression, teachers' roles and the demands of practice (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Battiste, 2000; Cherubini, 2014; Oskineegish & Berger, 2013; Shockey, 2000; Toulouse, 2016; Wimmer, Legare, Arcand & Cottrell, 2009; Wotherspoon, 2006, 2008). Balancing dual expectations for culturally appropriate content and provincial guidelines is referred to often as a site of intensification and workload for teachers (Wotherspoon, 2008).

Specific to the Aboriginal education context in Canada, recent literature has emphasized the work of teachers through themes of intensification and work housed within the site of a school. Conversely the existing literature on teachers' work, in general, emphasizes the complexities of teacher professionalism and roles, the work and lives of teachers, political agency, and the behaviours and characteristics of teachers. Although this body of literature informs my research, it is significant to note that what has emerged from this literature review is the pressing need to more fully understand the nature of teachers' work in remote First Nation communities and to do so within the complexities of on-going colonialism. My research is intended to contribute to this discussion.

### **Method**

Using Stake's (1995) qualitative case study approach, I explored the work of non-local teachers in a remote First Nation community in Ontario. The work of teachers bound the case and detailed information was collected using a variety of data collection procedures (Creswell, 2003; Stake, 1995).

### **Case Study Research**

Case study research has made significant contributions to the field of education. Generally speaking,

[a] case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in a process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than

confirmation. Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research. (Merriam, 1998, p. 19)

The case study approaches used for this research were both intrinsic and instrumental. According to Stake (2005), an intrinsic approach is “undertaken because, first and last, one wants a better understanding of this particular case” and an instrumental approach can “provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization” (p. 445). Because “there is no hard and fast line distinguishing intrinsic from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose” (p. 445), both intrinsic and instrumental approaches were utilized in my project. This facilitated provision of depth about the context and setting of the research while also allowing the work of teachers to be further situated and embedded within a broader discourses in Aboriginal education.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection took place in the spring of 2013. I visited the research site for two weeks during which time I collected data through individual interviews and focus groups. I also maintained a research journal documenting my experiences, impressions, thoughts and feelings to aid in understanding the setting and the context.

Participant recruitment occurred through school communications to teachers such as emailing notifications and making announcements at staff meetings. Participation in the interview phase was open to all teachers in the community. Fifteen teachers volunteered to take part in individual interviews and, of those, five participated in the focus groups. The teachers in the research group included both beginning and experienced teachers and male and female teachers ranging in age from 22 to 60 plus. Of the 15 teachers, 14 were non-Aboriginal and 1 was Aboriginal but was not originally

from the community of Grassy Hills. The participant group of non-local teachers will be referred to as “the participants” or “the teachers” throughout the remainder of this dissertation. Six of the teachers had been in the community for more than three years and three had substantial teaching experience in First Nation communities but were new to Grassy Hills. 7 of the participants had over 5 years of teaching experience in total. Of the 15 participants, 6 were elementary school teachers and 9 were secondary school teachers.

Each teacher participated in a semi-structured interview lasting from 45 minutes up to three hours, with the average interview time being approximately one and a half hours. A conversational interview method was adopted because, as Patton (2002) observes, it “offers maximum flexibility to pursue information in whatever direction appears to be appropriate, depending on what emerges from observing a particular setting or from talking with one or more individuals in that setting” (p. 342). This style of interviewing, along with field observations, provided numerous opportunities to capture in-context data.

An interview guide (see Appendix A) was used to ensure that major issues and themes of the inquiry were covered consistently while still providing flexibility to build a conversation around a particular issue. Thus the order and emphasis changed in each interview to harness situational differences or respond to the context (Patton, 2002) but similar core topics were covered in each interview. I audio-recorded the interviews and focus groups and utilized a transcription service to complete the transcribing.

During the second phase of data collection I conducted two focus groups with two and three teachers respectively. One focus group ran for 40 minutes while the other lasted one and a half hours. The focus groups offered an opportunity to further explore

specific themes and patterns that emerged from the interviews. The focus groups were not conversations directed at solving problems or making decisions but were opportunities for participants to hear responses from others to questions and make additional comments to move thinking forward. Participants were not expected to seek consensus or argue; rather, the goal of the focus groups was to get “high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others” (Patton, 2002, p. 386). I facilitated the focus groups in keeping with Krueger’s (1994) suggestion that they should be strategically planned to yield the necessary data “on a defined area of interest in a permissive nonthreatening environment” (p.6). Focus groups, of course, have limitations and specific to this research was a concern about participant risk and confidentiality. Although confidentiality could not be guaranteed, I kept the existing relationships of colleagues and the workplace dynamic in mind and I tried to ensure that the focus group setting was safe and that all participants felt comfortable enough to contribute to the group’s dialogue without being subjected to ridicule or judgment or fearing that their comments would be shared beyond the focus group. As I completed each of the interviews, I asked the participants if they would be interested in volunteering for a focus group and discussed issues of confidentiality and risk with them. Two participants agreed right away and said they knew which colleagues they would like to do a focus group with. It is safe to conclude that this is where the participants indicated they knew who they could trust and who they felt comfortable enough with to engage in frank conversation. The next day both of those participants came to me and named the other teachers they were prepared to talk to in focus groups. The teachers who had been named came to me later in the day, volunteered to participate in a focus group and asked about



scheduling one. In this way, the teachers themselves took control of the focus group process in order to protect themselves and ensure the confidentiality of the material they would share. Given that I had already become aware of how fearful the teachers were about speaking out, I understood their caution around structuring the focus groups. I audio-recorded the focus group discussions, and they were later transcribed through a transcription service. I also kept anecdotal notes on the focus group interactions in my research journal.

Field notes in the form of a research journal were used as a requirement of doing qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Field notes are “the most important determinant” (Patton, 2002, p. 302), as nothing should be trusted to simple recall. Throughout data collection I recorded field notes that were heavily descriptive and included the following: date, location, time, who was present, physical setting, events, activities, interactions, direct quotes, insights, interpretations, and beginning analysis. Additionally, my feelings, reactions, reflections, and personal meanings were also included. Maintaining a research journal with descriptive field notes calls on an ethnographic method that reveals and makes clear the emic perspective, that of the insider (Fetterman, 1989; Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), “field notes are the fundamental database for constructing case studies and carrying out thematic analysis in qualitative research” (p. 305). Not only are field notes important to qualitative case studies, they are vitally important when adopting a reflexive stance (Kovach, 2010).

### **Data Analysis**

Before the data were analyzed, member checking was completed. Participants were provided with their interview and focus group transcripts and asked to consider

whether they accurately depicted their contributions. They were offered an opportunity to make additions or modifications. Member checking was completed within three months of the data collection and only one participant made modifications to the interview transcript.

The data collected from the focus groups and interviews was analyzed for themes and patterns using the thematic network technique as a tool for identifying, reporting, and analyzing patterns within that data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). “Thematic networks are web-like illustrations that summarize the main themes constituting a piece of text” (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p. 1). Basic and organizing themes were derived through word-based techniques and the observation of word repetitions, key words in context, and a constant comparative method. The constant comparative method, originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), is based on thematic differences and similarities among texts. A compare and contrast approach illuminated the ways in which themes were different or similar to one another across texts (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The constant comparative method was utilized throughout the data collection and analysis phases. Following word-based approaches, the analytic steps of a thematic network analysis, as described by Attride-Stirling (2001), were followed starting with coding the material, identifying themes, and constructing multiple thematic networks. I used this approach to data analysis because “the thematic networks technique is a robust and highly sensitive tool for the systematization and presentation of qualitative analyses” (Attride-Stirling, 2001 p.1).

## **Organization of the Dissertation**

Each of the papers in this integrated-article format dissertation focuses on one aspect of Aboriginal education as it relates to teachers' work in a remote First Nation community in Northern Ontario. The nature of teachers' work is the umbrella under which each paper is conceptualized, and the experiences of the teachers are positioned within a broader scope of Aboriginal education in Canada. There are three papers: a) *Teacher attrition in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community: A narrative re-storying*, b) *Teaching and fear: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, and c) *Understanding roles and relationships: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*.

The three articles have been prepared for publication in specific journals and I have crafted the articles to adhere to the publishing guidelines for each journal. As a result, each paper is bound not only by the scope of the over-all study and the type of data collected but also by the need to write a focused paper within the word length suggested by each journal. A preamble to each article is included to clarify the purpose of the article in relation to the research questions and the other articles. A short conclusion completes the dissertation and provides the means to bring key ideas and findings together across all three papers.

## **Understanding the Research Site**

The community in which I studied teachers' work is part of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), a political territorial organization established in 1973 that represents 49 First Nation communities within Ontario, across treaties five and nine. NAN spans the

northern two-thirds of the province of Ontario covering 210,000 square miles and represents the “legitimate, socioeconomic, and political aspirations of its First Nation members of Northern Ontario to all levels of government in order to allow local self-determination while establishing spiritual, cultural, social, and economic independence” (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, n.d.). The people of NAN traditionally speak three languages, Cree, Ojibway, and OjiCree. The area of focus for this research study is in Treaty Nine where Cree is the first language.

Within the NAN region, each school operates under the management of a local education authority (LEA), uses the Ontario provincial curriculum, employs provincially certified teachers, and follows the policies that govern the practice of teachers issued by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Ontario College of Teachers. However, educational funding flows from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), a department of the federal government.

To further detail the research site, it is important to provide some additional background about the retention and attrition of teachers in First Nation communities in Northern Ontario. The recruitment process for remote communities is highly contextual as contract agreements, benefit packages, travel, and housing subsidy vary from one LEA to another. Geographic factors dictate the degree of isolation and level of access to transportation lines and are often reflected in variable pay grids and tax deductions through northern zone prescriptions. These contextual dynamics pose difficult challenges for the recruitment and retention of teachers and often contribute to high rates of attrition. As a result, retention and attrition of culturally competent teachers in the north has been identified as an ongoing issue for First Nation school authorities (Assembly of First

Nations, 2012). Low graduation rates, lack of consistency in school staffing, compromised trust, and lack of community and cultural knowledge are just a few of the issues raised in relation to teacher effectiveness, experience, and tenure in the academic literature (Chell, Steeves, & Sackney, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rowe, 2007; York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007).

Community members in NAN live in poverty, with few resources, limited access to facilities, and inequitable educational opportunities. Students across NAN usually leave their home communities to attend high school in urban centers and many of the elementary schools are inadequately resourced to meet student needs. The political, geographic, social, economic, and cultural realities in NAN produce an educational situation that draws teachers' work beyond the site of the school. Teachers find themselves at the center of this context as they live and work in NAN.

### **Situating Myself**

I was at the center of this context negotiating my role as a teacher, a visitor, and an outsider when I called one NAN community home for three years, prior to beginning the Ph.D. program. There, I taught students in the secondary school system, and became forever changed. I was deeply affected by my time teaching and living in the North as my entire way of knowing the world, knowing myself, and understanding teaching changed dramatically as I faced the political, social, economic, and educational realities that my students and NAN communities have been forced to contend with for decades. Informed by my personal and professional experiences working in the North, this research project is partly personal. It is driven by a desire to understand the complexities of teachers' work in remote Northern Ontario and to explore and unpack the professional and

personal circumstances that complicate efforts to stabilize the teaching force. At the same time, this research has broader policy implications and may impact local policy initiatives and staffing procedures at LEAs. As was noted earlier, there is a strong relationship between teachers' work and student success. This research begins the process of looking carefully at this dynamic. If Canada is to improve the quality of Aboriginal education in any substantive way, the work of teachers and their contributions to improvement must, out of necessity, be better understood.

### **The Papers**

All three papers in this integrated-articles dissertation are drawn from one larger case study, which focuses on the nature of teachers' work in one remote First Nation community in Northern Ontario. For the purposes of all three papers, the community has been called Grassy Hills to protect the identity of teachers and the location of the community. Although the individual papers are drawn from a larger case study, each attends to distinct but ultimately connected, aspects of teachers' work, such as attrition, fear, and relationship building in Grassy Hills.

The first paper, *Teacher attrition in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community: A narrative re-storying*, is focused on addressing the dynamics of teacher attrition and retention in a remote First Nation community. It addresses why some teachers stay in the community to teach, despite several challenges, and why some choose to leave. After only a few interviews and prior to the focus groups, I began to see strong repeated patterns in the data. All the participants detailed, in very similar ways, the tensions they struggled with when making decisions about their own retention. In fact, the stories began to merge into a common narrative. I re-storied that data in this

paper and presented the narrative of retention and attrition by creating four teacher characters to represent the dominant narratives expressed by participants. Through the re-storied narratives of Dale, Sue, Caitlin, and Brett, the complexities of teacher choices around retention or attrition are unpacked. Although several professional issues such as rate of pay, benefits, living conditions, and teaching assignments were discussed, the overriding conclusion was that attrition would inevitably occur. The attrition was not from the profession of teaching but attrition from the community. Personal factors such as starting a family, buying a home, being close to family and friends were strong incentives that lead teachers to leave Grassy Hills. Unfortunately, those factors cannot be mediated effectively by the LEA. I conclude by making several short and long-term policy related recommendations to suggest how the LEA might re-envision factors of attrition as a means to boost retention.

The second paper, *Teaching and fear: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, explores how emotions experienced by teachers, specifically fear, have an impact on their experiences living and teaching in a remote First Nation community. Many teachers, while discussing their work, cited feelings of fear associated with losing their position or not having their yearly employment contract extended for another school year. They also expressed fears about being reprimanded or disciplined for speaking out or not following orders. Teachers also felt their communications, teaching practices, and general behavior in the community were always being monitored and observed by other teachers, administrators, members of the LEA, and parents. As a means to cope with feelings of fear, teachers fell silent or self-censored not only in their professional lives within the school, but also in their personal lives at

home and during community events and at public venues. The data in this paper paints a clear picture of teachers working in an atmosphere of fear and raised a key question: Why did teachers experience this fear? Colonization, and oppression are key conceptual categories used to explain the fear as teachers are positioned within a system that continues to be deeply colonized through federal funding and other measures of state control that dictate how education in First Nation communities operates. Although much of data shared in this paper centered on fear in teachers' work, teachers discussed many other elements of their experiences in Grassy Hills. Despite their fear, many teachers returned to Grassy Hills year after year and often the role of students played a part in their decision to do so. Many of the participants discussed their relationships with the students, both in terms of positive relationships but also, in some cases, in terms of obstacles to building relationships with students.

The third and final paper, *Understanding roles and relationships: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, explores how teachers negotiate their roles and relationships in the community. Due to the relational nature of education in an Indigenous context and the growing body of literature that supports the need for strong relationships with students, it makes sense to examine the roles teachers play and how they understand and construct relationships. As a former high school teacher in a remote First Nation community myself, I found that a story of my own, *the skidoo story*, was interconnected with stories shared by the participants and helped emphasize some key findings in the data. Autobiographically, I have interspersed my skidoo story throughout the paper to highlight a turn in my own thinking about my role as a former teacher and my relationship with students.



The research literature points out that positive relationships between students and their teachers are a key factor in Aboriginal student success (Collins, 1993; Fanshawe, 2000; Toulouse, 2013). Reviewing my data, I saw patterns and thus developed four categories that capture how teachers understand their roles and relationships in different ways. The four categories are pedestal people, educational transitioners, relationship builders, and community integrators. Pedestal people struggle to uphold the power and hierarchy needed to maintain their role, which makes establishing authentic relationships with students a challenge. Educational transitioners shift their thinking when they begin to acknowledge that there is a need to change, to unlearn their previously established conceptions of a teacher's role and teacher-student relationships. Relationship builders see opportunities to improve educational experiences in their classroom by establishing relationships with students and their families. Although the primary focus for relationship builders is to improve the classroom experience for themselves and their students, they are committed to connecting to their students outside of the classroom. Community integrators seek opportunities to reach well beyond dominant western conceptions of teaching and adopt action-oriented community-based involvement for the purposes of belonging and integration. Community integrators also see that parents and members of the community can be teachers, too, because they have knowledge and areas of expertise to share with students. Local, practice-based policy suggestions are offered to support the transition of teachers to a community integration model of relationship because, as I argue, it is this approach which is most likely to support meaningful, culturally relevant education for the young.

## Conclusion

The papers that make up this dissertation offer some new ways to better understand the nature of teachers' work in one remote First Nation community. They address issues related to the complexities of attrition and retention, teachers' fear, and teachers' roles and relationships. Each paper draws on data gathered for a single larger case study, allowing me to explore different approaches to writing, reporting results, and telling each story. With the first and last papers I used two different narrative approaches, re-storying and autobiographical writing. In each case, the papers all point to broader issues in Aboriginal education, and I utilized the occasional rhetorical question to signpost my thinking and guide the reader through discussion about issues such as the inequities of funding, the overwhelming dominance of colonization and western ways of knowing, and the work that remains to be done in Faculties of Education across Canada to better prepare new teachers for working with Aboriginal students and in Aboriginal communities.

I took on this research problem because it was close to my own experience and I wanted to explore the nature of teachers' work and understand what might be done to better stabilize the teaching force. What I discovered was a dissertation process akin to walking along a winding pathway exploring both the research problem but also the way the problem intersects with research methodologies, theories, ethics, and my own experiences as a former secondary school teacher.

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## Preamble to Chapter 2

The first article, *Teacher attrition in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community: A narrative re-storying*, primarily addresses issues of teacher retention and alludes to some of the other issues that arise in later articles. As such, I have put this paper first to set the stage and introduce some key contextual dynamics that teachers experience in Grassy Hills. This is the broadest of the three articles and presents many of the issues and tensions relevant to understanding teacher attrition.

One of the advantages of the integrated-article dissertation is that each of the three articles is both related to, but distinct from, the others. This allows for some flexibility in modes of presentation and thus means that I could explore and practice three different approaches to writing an article. I thought this would serve me well moving forward in my career. In this first paper I use narrative re-storying approach to look at teacher retention and attrition and have created a conversation among four composite teacher-characters named, Brett, Caitlin, Sue, and Dale who are meeting for dinner. Their re-storied conversation brings together key factors, both professional and personal, that real teachers discussed in the interviews I conducted.

Re-storying is the researcher's process of taking apart data and then reassembling parts of it into a different narrative framework, in this case a dialogue or conversation among four characters. Creswell (2008) concisely outlines the process of re-storying.

After [the research participants] tell a story about their experiences, narrative researchers retell (or re-story or remap) the story in their own words. They do this to provide order and sequence to it. Re-storying is the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and

scene), and then rewrites the story in a chronological sequence. (p. 519)

I have re-storied themes in the data that were generated through the thematic network technique (Attride-Stirling, 2001), around factors of retention and attrition. I utilized those themes as anchors in the dialogue I created among the four teacher-characters, who represent a convergence of all the participants and bring voice and a collective conversation to bear on teachers' thinking about whether or not they will return for another academic year. I re-storied the data using my own words but often I utilized key words and phrases that were repeated in the data multiple times and by multiple participants.

It is important to acknowledge that there is a multiplicity of meanings in narrative writing and the ways in which the participants told me about their experiences are “neither completely coherent nor completely linearly structured around one plot” (Sermijn, Devlieger, & Loots, 2008, p.634). Coupled with my own construction of their stories, the re-storied data does not represent a complete whole, but rather a snapshot in time of the participants' thinking and telling of their own stories.

Because the actual teacher-participants were at various stages of their careers and thinking about their own attrition in different contexts, presenting the data in other ways would not have as effectively revealed the fluidity in their thinking and the conversational tone in which teachers discussed their own decision-making processes related to staying in or leaving the community. In fact, many of the teachers told me that their decisions about leaving were not individualized. They were made through conversations with other colleagues that happened repeatedly over time. Thus, I re-storied the data to bring collective and shared ideas forward. I wanted to reflect not only

the factors teachers discussed related to their attrition but how they made those decisions through a shared social context. The re-storying approach best met those needs.

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## **CHAPTER 2: TEACHER ATTRITION IN A NORTHERN ONTARIO REMOTE FIRST NATION COMMUNITY: A NARRATIVE RE-STORYING**

Teacher attrition rates in northern First Nations communities are estimated to be as high as 40% annually (Anderson, Orton, & Horwick, 2004; Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011). This statistic is critically important in the discourse of First Nations education because “teacher recruitment and retention, closely connected with teacher efficacy, are considered as causal factors that influence the quality of student learning and educational achievement” (Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011). First Nations organizations also have identified teacher attrition and retention as an issue requiring further attention (Assembly of First Nations, 2012; Chiefs of Ontario, 2004). Stability in the teaching force is especially important in the First Nations context because the relational ontology of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning (Ermine, 1995; Simpson, 2000; Wilson, 2007) makes trusting relationships central not only between teachers and students but with parents and communities as a whole. Furthermore, the problem of teacher retention has assumed new urgency since the Aboriginal population is quickly growing, with a large portion being children of school age (Statistics Canada, 2008). This demographic reality will compound and magnify issues of teacher attrition and, ultimately, the greatest impact will be felt by students.

To date, explanations for teacher transience in First Nation communities have been linked to the payment of lower salaries, the lack of pensions, the absence of union protection, and a general lack of conditions comparable to what teachers employed in provincial systems enjoy (Anderson, Orton, & Horwick, 2004; Chiefs of Ontario, 2004;

Kitchenham & Chasteauneuf, 2010; Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011). Undoubtedly, all of these factors are relevant as teachers make decisions about staying in or leaving their positions. However, as part of a larger study on teachers' work in a Northern Ontario First Nation community, I discovered that factors contributing to attrition are deeply intertwined and connected not only to material circumstances but also to the teachers' desired career progression and their own personal circumstances with family, children and relationships. Using a narrative re-storying approach, this study unpacks and explores the complexities of teacher attrition in one remote First Nations community in Northern Ontario. To protect confidentiality, I have named this community Grassy Hills. After summarizing the research design, I offer a brief description of Grassy Hills to provide the situating context for the research on teacher attrition. Then I discuss the methodological reasons for utilizing a re-storying approach embedded within the narrative tradition. I then re-story a conversation among four teacher-characters who collectively represent all the participants in my inquiry, as a method to reveal considerations that lead to attrition. Finally, a brief discussion highlights some possible options for ameliorating attrition.

### **Design**

This paper reports on part of a larger inquiry that focused on a central question: What is the nature of teachers' work in a remote First Nations community in Northern Ontario? A case study approach was adopted to maintain a scope specific to the teachers and how they conceived of the issues and concerns that dictated their work and lives in the community. A case study approach allowed for the depth and richness needed to understand the heavily contextual and complex dynamic of teachers' work.

Both individual interviews and focus groups were conducted during a two-week data collection period in the early spring of 2013. Six elementary and 9 secondary teachers responded to an open call for participation. Fifteen out of a possible 30 teachers actively participated in interviews that lasted an average of one and half hours, but in some cases up to three hours. I also conducted two focus groups with two and three teachers respectively. The teachers in the focus groups had participated in the individual interviews but expressed an interest in discussing specific issues in more detail in a group setting. It was during these focus groups that the connectivity among the factors contributing to teacher attrition came to life and I could begin to see how certain elements such as compensation were contextualized in more personal circumstances such as student debt or loans. The focus groups provided some of the most specific data revealed in the re-storying.

To protect the identity of the participants and the community, I will not share specific details about individual teachers. However, the 15 participants ranged in age from 22 to 60 plus and included both male and female teachers. Fourteen of the 15 participants were non-Aboriginal. The participants included experienced teachers, new teachers directly out of teacher education programs, and those for whom teaching was a second career. Some of the teachers had been in the community for more than three years and some had substantial experience working in First Nations schools but were new to the community of Grassy Hills.

### **Grassy Hills**

The community of Grassy Hills is located in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) in Northern Ontario. The community is remote and can be reached only by air, which



reduces access to goods and services, including food. There are few employment opportunities, and access to clean drinking water, health care, and a variety of other social services is limited and has a negative impact on the daily life of the community's residents. The schools in Grassy Hills, like all schools in the NAN, are federally funded and the federal government requires adoption of the provincial curriculum and associated policies on the grounds that they are needed to ensure transition opportunities for students who choose to continue to post-secondary education or leave the community to attend provincial schools in more urban areas (Drummond & Rosenbluth 2013; Paquette & Fallon, 2010). Teachers are required to have their provincial teaching certification through the Ontario College of Teachers and must be prepared to implement the Ontario provincial curriculum along with the local mandate to include more culturally relevant content for students through the existing curriculum.

Teachers are hired on contracts for a period of one academic school year. Each spring, contract renewals occur and often teachers are offered a contract and asked to return. Occasionally a teacher may not get such an offer of contract extension. During this period of contract renewal, teachers regularly engage with one another to discuss their thoughts about either accepting a contract renewal or declining and moving on to other opportunities. The teachers in Grassy Hills and many other First Nations schools in NAN, do not have union or federation representation. As a result, the teachers are entirely subject to the conditions and terms of their individual contracts. This often results in the assignment of additional teaching responsibilities and extracurricular commitments as well as compromised preparation time. Compensation, benefit packages, and pension contributions are an active part of the recruitment and retention process (Mueller, Carr-

Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011). However, the teachers in Grassy Hills are placed on a pay grid through an evaluation process and the benefits and pension contributions are standardized for all teaching staff so although it is a point of discussion, the standardized nature of the compensation and benefits package tends to neutralize comparative conversations within the teaching staff. According to participants, compensation, benefits, and pension contributions in Grassy Hills are comparable to the provincial average with the added benefit that housing is partially subsidized.

### **Narrative Inquiry & Re-storying**

The early work in narrative inquiry in education was developed as both a methodology and a way to understand the experiences of teachers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). In this case, I am utilizing narrative inquiry, specifically the process of re-storying, to better understand and make visible the experiences of teachers as they discuss, ponder, and negotiate their roles in the community of Grassy Hills. As already noted, much of the literature on teacher attrition focuses on factors such as compensation, workload, and location but a core goal of narrative inquiry is to study the professional and personal experiences through stories that have seldom been heard (Chase, 2005; Creswell, 2008). In other words, the purpose of narrative inquiry is to ask questions to seek deeper understanding of a particular life experience (Pinnegar & Dayne, 2007). Utilizing narrative inquiry in this research has allowed the complexities of the experiences of teachers to emerge through story. Such an approach takes on particular significance, since, as I observed in my research journal, participants regularly shared their experiences with me through story.

Re-storying is the researcher's process of taking apart data and then reassembling

parts of it into a different narrative framework, in this case a dialogue or conversation among four characters. Creswell (2008) concisely outlines the process of re-storying.

After [the research participants] tell a story about their experiences, narrative researchers retell (or re-story or remap) the story in their own words. They do this to provide order and sequence to it. Re-storying is the process in which the researcher gathers stories, analyzes them for key elements of the story (e.g., time, place, plot, and scene), and then rewrites the story in a chronological sequence (p. 519).

In the section that follows, I have re-storied themes in the data around factors of attrition. To do this, I have created a dialogue among four teachers who will be introduced in the next section. These four characters represent a convergence of all the participants and bring voice and a collective conversation to bear on teachers' thinking about whether or not they will return for another academic year. It is a story of tensions, decision-making, exploration, and insights into the challenges and opportunities teachers experience during their time living and teaching in a remote First Nation community in Northern Ontario.

### **Introducing the Participants**

Let me introduce you to Brett, Caitlin, Sue, and Dale, the four composite teacher-characters I have created by attending faithfully to the field texts I gathered.

Brett came to teaching as a second career and began his teaching practice in a grade 8 class in Grassy Hills. He is always engaged in new technologies in education and connects regularly with other teachers in his division to talk about incorporating educational technologies into the classroom. Although Brett has been in the community for three school years, each spring he reconsiders his options. Brett is currently engaged

to be married and, in the future, would like to buy a home and have a family. In his time outside of school, Brett loves coaching the boys' hockey and basketball teams and fishing with work colleagues.

Caitlin is a first year teacher and started teaching high school English and art in Grassy Hills directly out of her teacher education program. She loves her art programming and enjoyed putting on a student art exhibit this year. Caitlin has substantial student debt and is working toward paying it off. She is an avid cross-country skier and loves the cold and snowy winters. Because she grew up in a small town, Caitlin understands and really enjoys the close-knit community of Grassy Hills and the sense that everyone is connected and knows one another. She also visits regularly with Sue for support and guidance.

Sue is a veteran teacher with more than 20 years in the profession. She teaches grade 3 in Grassy Hills and has done so for the past five years. She is nearing retirement and brings to Grassy Hills many experiences in teaching both internationally and with First Nations schools from across the country. Sue has three grandchildren and a husband in a southern urban location that she visits as often as possible. Sue is a mentor to many of the new teachers and takes the time to support them and show them the ropes. Sue also brings a wealth of expertise in literacy to her job and her work over the past five years has really helped increase literacy levels in the elementary school.

Dale came to Grassy Hills after 12 years teaching in international contexts around the world. He is originally from a rural town in northern Ontario and decided to return home and explore the North of his very own province. As a high school geography and history teacher for the past two years, Dale maintains a strong interest in culture,

language, and the local history. Dale works with Elders to bring local history to life in his classes and enjoys hunting and trapping with a few friends in the community. He recently has experienced some health issues, and his wife, who lives in southern Ontario, is very concerned about him.

Over dinner at Sue's house, Brett, Caitlin, Sue, and Dale discuss whether or not they will return for another year of teaching in the community. It is spring, and the contracts for the next academic year have been delivered. All four have been asked back for another year and the conversation begins as Dale enters the kitchen and asks Sue if she will be returning the next year.

**Are you coming back next year?**

Dale: So, Sue, are you coming back next year?

Sue: That is the question of the day right now isn't it? I am really not sure. There are just so many things to consider. My granddaughter just turned three and I saw the pictures from her birthday party and I feel like I missed a really important event. When things like that – family stuff – comes up it makes it really hard to want to stay. On the other hand, I am so close to retirement and I just love the students here. I can't imagine teaching anywhere else. Besides, at this point I am just thankful to have been offered a contract. I heard Joe wasn't asked back for another year. What about you Dale?

Dale: I am kind of in the same place. You know, I have had a few health scares lately and my wife back home is really concerned. She thinks I should come home and look for a teaching position in the provincial system so I can be closer to her and health care. But,

you know, just last week I had Elders come into the class and it went so well. My history programming is really coming together and I think it has taken the last two years of work to see it all come together now. And plus, the fishing has been amazing this spring! I feel terrible for Joe, but I think many people are just keeping quiet about everything and being thankful for their own contract. No one wants to rock the boat right?

Caitlin: Are you talking about fishing again Dale?

Dale: Of course, have you been yet?

Caitlin: Not yet but I am hoping to get out. The skiing this past winter was just amazing. I got to explore the area and see some places off the river I would never have seen without my skiing. I am really excited for next year because I want to take my students and do some activities outside and get out in the community.

Sue: So, you have already decided to come back for another year?

Caitlin: I guess so. To be honest, I have student debt up to my ears and being here is helping me pay it off and helping me to gain experience that I might be able to use one day when I go back to southern Ontario. I took this job right out of my education program because I knew I would never get hired in the South. I don't think it will hurt to stay another year. Although it does scare me knowing that next year I may not get offered a contract. It just makes everything feel so temporary.

Sue: It really is a great experience for you Caitlin, and you have come such a long way this year.

Caitlin: Thanks Sue. Besides, the art show was a major hit and I have already starting talking to artists in the community about joining in next year and having a sale as well. I just don't feel ready to go yet. What about you Brett, you've been here for three years already. What are you doing for next year?

Brett: That's a tough one! I am not sure right now. I am trying to consider all my options. In some ways, I don't want to leave. I am comfortable here and you guys know how much I love my grade 8 group. We finally got all the iPads into the classes and I really want to see how that will work out for next year. I think my group will be small next year, only 18 students, so that's a bonus, too. But, you know, my fiancée back home is ready to buy a house and start a family so the pull to go home is certainly there.

Dale: That is a tough spot, Brett. It's really hard to maintain those relationships at home when you're here for 10 months of the year.

Brett: So true. But here is my issue. Even if I wanted to leave and go back home to southern Ontario, how would I even get to job interviews if I could get one? If an interview happens in May in Toronto let's say, how would I ask for leave from my position here to go for an interview? It would cost a fortune and then who would cover my class – it's not like we have supply teachers. It's like being between a rock and a hard

place. And, the pay here is basically the same as down south. I have been able to save up some money for a down payment.

Caitlin: I didn't think of all that stuff. You guys have some tough decisions. Do you think our experience teaching here is valued in the provincial system? How long can I stay and still make a successful transition to the provincial system?

Sue: Well, Dale, you might have something to say about this because you have also taught internationally, but I think the experience is really valuable and can be translated to other places. But I also know the job market for new teachers is totally different now than when I started.

Dale: Yeah, it's a different world down south, Sue. Most new teachers are competing to just get on a supply list. Most people wait years to get hired on more permanently.

Caitlin: Maybe it's a good thing that I stay here for now. Things down south don't look so good and I don't know if I want to take my chances and maybe get a on a supply list somewhere. Even then it might take years before I get my own class. I just love having so much freedom and flexibility in my teaching here.

Brett: That's true but I guess you have to plan for some transition time. You know I worked in a completely different field than education before I started teaching and it took a few years to get things started. In some ways, I think I might plan my exit from here



more than a year in advance. I could save up money to get me through waiting to find a new position. I might even have to go back to my old job just to get me through, but I really don't want to do that.

Dale: This is also such a hard decision to make at this time of year because you start to feel so positive at the end of the school year, you're more reflective and the weather gets nicer and you feel like you will have a rest over the summer. This is not an easy decision. I also find myself asking around about who else will come back, in terms of administration, although I never really trust much of what I hear since there are so many politics. I am glad I can trust you guys.

Sue: For sure, especially the administration! If things were to change drastically with who the principals are right now, that would seriously impact my decision.

Caitlin: Are the principals going to leave?

Brett: Well, they, too, have contracts for only a year so they are probably thinking some of the same things we are.

Caitlin: Oh, if my principal left, I don't know what next year would be like at all. I kind of made my decision assuming most people would be back and things would be basically the same. I have seen how other people get stuck with so many extra-curriculars and fundraising. I would be worried if a new principal came and delegated all that to me.

Sue: Hopefully most people stay, but every year people leave and new people come and that makes it so hard for the kids and for the teachers who stay as well. It's like every year we are getting to know new people and helping them out.

Caitlin: That's so true Sue. I would be lost without you guys helping me along the way. Who would have been there to help me with my unit plans and figure out how to get keys and everything else you helped me with?

Dale: So true. That's one of the things that really keeps me here. Knowing that I have established really strong routines with the kids and other staff and the new students coming in each fall know me and know what to expect. Each year gets easier with the kids. It's just the politics of the school, the gossip, and trying to fly under the radar that make it tough.

Brett: For sure, you get to know the parents and the students and how everything works. It's one of those things that keep me put. But, you're right, Dale, all the stuff about not knowing what can happen to your job from one day to the next freaks me out and I know I couldn't cope with that in the long-term.

Caitlin: Well, I guess part of it for me was also knowing that Bev and Sam would be back. Since we teach together and live side by side, I felt more comfortable knowing they

would be here, too. I know who I will be living with and I feel like they are my family up here and I need them. It would be hard to come back and not really know anyone.

Dale: Being connected here is such a big deal. For the most part I feel pretty good but I have those down days where I just feel so frustrated because things didn't work out the way I wanted at school. I feel unrecognized and I just get angry and want to be in a place where my work is acknowledged. I know so many staff that feel that way and have kinda' just decided to toe the line and stay out of trouble's way.

Caitlin: Yeah, I know how you feel. The art show was great. The kids loved it and I had a great time with it but no one ever said thanks for doing that. It was almost like it was expected of me. A thanks would have been nice!

Brett: Same thing happened with the iPads in all the classes. I got a grant for us to buy those and did all the set up and training for them and not a single teacher or administration person said anything to me. It would have been nice to be recognized in some way. But I guess I have to remind myself I didn't do it for recognition.

Sue: That was great work, Brett, and Caitlin, your art show was amazing! It can be tough to feel invisible and that's how I feel sometimes. I still, after five- years, feel like an outsider. I see the boundaries of what I can and can't be involved in and sometimes that makes me feel like all this work goes for nothing. And sometimes I don't know if I have done something wrong, so I worry about stepping on toes.

Brett: Sue! It is not for nothing. At the end of day, we can only focus on the students. Everything else just gets so messy and complicated and can totally mess up my head. I am here to teach and the students are my focus. If I pay attention to being worried about my job all the time, it's just going to eat me up.

Sue: I know. I guess some days I just get down. I also know that as I get closer to retirement, I kind of want to leave on a high note. I don't want to stay and leave angry and bitter and annoyed. I love teaching and I want to finish off still being able to say that.

Dale: OK, guys, this was a good talk but none of us actually answered my original question. Are you coming back next year?

Caitlin: Can we just eat dinner now?!

### **Discussion**

The complexities of teacher attrition are revealed throughout this dialogue. Factors such as compensation, position instability, contract length, family commitments, school dynamics, administrator roles, geographic location, personal commitments, and financial goals, among others, have been included to reflect the variety of issues that teachers discussed in terms of their own considerations about staying or leaving. Although each of these factors has importance alone, they are often intertwined and individual teachers place different values or weights on those that are more or less meaningful or relevant to them.

One important distinction here is that participants in this case are not discussing their attrition from the profession of teaching; rather, they are discussing their attrition from the teaching force in the community of Grassy Hills. Their decision-making is focused on the site of their work as teachers, and is attrition from place, rather than attrition from the profession. Consistent across all participant data is the assumption that it is inevitable that leaving the community will occur. The only question teachers pondered was when.

Single year contracts create a short-term vision of retention, which is problematic for the community in a number of ways. If beginning teachers utilize positions in a First Nation school as a training ground which can be abandoned once teaching skills have been developed, they benefit individually and the next schools they work at also reap benefits. However, schools like Grassy Hills are drained of resources and experience and the First Nation students essentially become subjects and sites where teachers hone their skills and experiment with their practice in ways to refine it and gain the expertise needed to be hired elsewhere, for more permanent positions. When experienced teachers leave, they similarly deprive the community and students of their knowledge and expertise and the school loses mentors for the beginning teachers who are hired. In addition, constant teacher turnover has a negative outcome for students by compromising trust and disrupting school dynamics (York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007). Trust is a foundational component of educational relationships and when teacher turnover is high, establishing those trusting school relationships becomes an ongoing challenge because students become cynical or apathetic and resist relationships as a protective device to avoid feeling betrayed or hurt.

There are both short and long-term policy related recommendations that attend to issues that teachers in Grassy Hills experience. In the re-storied narrative several issues are raised. Sue's character clearly depicts the role of induction and mentorship support needed and valued by teachers. Brett, Dale and Caitlyn often refer to the relationships made with community members and emphasize a desire to become connected and involved in community life through coaching and recreational opportunities like hunting, fishing, and skiing. Finally, the re-storied narrative also emphasizes the tensions around decision-making with regard to length of tenure. Brett, Sue, Caitlyn, and Dale all discussed their reasons for either staying in the community or leaving. Due to single year contracts in Grassy Hills, this becomes a topic of conversation for all teachers every year. The discussions are about short-term stays rather than settling in for longer term, more secure contracts. How then, can the Local Education Authority (LEA) re-envision attrition factors as a plan for retention? In the short-term, induction and orientation programming, community inclusion, and continuous or multi-year contracts are strategies or approaches that could mediate some of the issues raised by the teachers.

### **Induction and Mentoring Programs**

According to a large body of literature, induction programming, consisting of support, guidance and orientation, is shown to support retention, particularly in the early stages of a career (Cherubini, 2007; Ingersoll & Kalik, 2003; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Although many of the teachers in Grassy Hills are not in the early stages of their career, they are in the early stages of their time teaching in a First Nation community and, as such, induction programming would offer support. Since the teachers are provincially certified and the schools are implementing provincial curriculum, why has the Ontario

Ministry of Education's New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) not been made available to beginning teachers in Grassy Hills? Although Grassy Hills schools are federally funded and the NTIP program is provincial, there have been circumstances in the past where federal-provincial agreements have been negotiated. For example, Grassy Hills schools are inspected by the Ontario Ministry of Education on a regular basis because they implement the Ontario curriculum. Could a similar agreement not be established where NTIP is made available to teachers in Grassy Hills? The NTIP is intended to support new teachers through induction, mentorship, and professional development. Built into the NTIP is a process whereby new teachers undergo a formal performance appraisal for the first two years of the program. Supporting performance appraisals of teachers would align with having continuous contracts and ensure steady progression during the early years of a teacher's practice in Grassy Hills. Where turnover is high and retention is an ongoing struggle, NTIP could be utilized as one foundational component of a retention strategy.

However, the model for induction and mentoring programs would have to be understood differently in a First Nation context. Teaching in Grassy Hills is as much about what happens in the community as what happens in the school and, as such, a mentoring program would require that life in school and beyond the school be supported. Incoming teachers could be partnered with a more experienced teacher and a member of the community. The involvement of community members, local staff, and Elders would be a necessary component to integrate teaching and learning about Indigenous approaches to child rearing, development, culture, worldview, and community values and dynamics. A model for induction programming that draws on experienced teachers

alongside members of the community would also serve to ease disruption during critical transition times. When teacher turnover is high, community members and staff members such as educational assistants, who are primarily from the community, could play an integral role by providing continuity between academic years, which could mediate the negative impact of higher levels of attrition and better support students, new teachers, and the school community.

Implementing an induction or mentoring program that draws on a partnership between teachers and community members would not only orient new teachers to the community and schools but could potentially better integrate teachers into community activities and community members into school events and programming, promote stronger relationships and understanding between teachers and community members, and boost retention by decreasing teacher isolation.

### **Contracts**

Continuing, or at least multi-year, contracts could help reduce high teacher turnover rates and provide a body of more experienced teachers capable of better supporting mentoring and induction programs, alongside members of the community. In Grassy Hills, contract terms are one year and contract offers are re-issued annually based on funding periods and projected student populations. Continuity in the teaching force might assist in stabilizing student populations from year to year and mediate one of the factors that currently dictate single year contracts. However, the LEA would need to maintain authority to end contracts if student populations were low or funding was reduced. In a geographically isolated area, challenges to teachers' work are compounded by a lack of external connection and support from a larger body representing teachers.



Creating a stable long-term approach to teacher retention would require that additional support be available for both teachers and the LEA to formally negotiate contracts, resolve grievances, and advocate for improved teaching and learning conditions.

Of course, developing community integrated mentoring and induction programs as well as using continuous contracts to boost retention assumes involvement and willing participation from the staff, community members, Elders and the LEA. This may or may not be feasible depending on the situation, funding, context, and existing relationships within the community. Although short-term policy recommendations can attend to the immediacy of retention, long-term policy planning also plays a significant role in teacher retention. Teacher education with collaborative stakeholder involvement can play an important role in long term planning to improve teacher retention in northern and remote First Nations communities.

### **Teacher Education**

In order for short and long-term policy recommendations to materialize, stakeholders must become engaged and invested in the goal of improving teacher retention in remote First Nation communities. One stakeholder in this systemic long-term approach to improve teacher retention is Faculties of Education across the province that provide teacher education programs as well as professional development opportunities through additional qualification courses. There are two ways that teacher education can improve teacher retention in First Nation communities and recognize education as a site of reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

One response to the TRC calls to action would be to develop Indigenous teacher education programs and increase teacher education opportunities for members of First

Nations communities in the North. Having qualified teachers within the community of Grassy Hills, who are from Grassy Hills, would help to eliminate a number of personal factors which play such a significant role in teacher attrition. However, Faculties of Education will need to meet the needs of First Nations students, recruit more First Nations students, and sustain authentic relationships with First Nations educational stakeholders in remote locations. Second, teacher education programs need to better address Aboriginal issues in education and better prepare non-Indigenous teachers for work outside of the southern urban centers of Ontario. Universities can provide undergraduate and teacher education programs that facilitate the integration of Aboriginal perspectives across curriculum.

### **Conclusion**

Increasing teacher retention in First Nations communities has been identified in the literature, both academic and grey, as requiring attention. When attrition rates are high and teacher efficacy, quality of student experience, and overall academic achievement is compromised, efforts to mobilize plans for stability are needed. The literature has demonstrated various factors contributing to attrition and retention of teachers in First Nations communities but the remote First Nations educational context in Ontario requires innovative policy and procedural reform to improve teacher retention based on the notion that attrition is inevitable. Through a narrative re-storying approach I have introduced a collective dialogue demonstrating the complexity of various attrition factors. In Grassy Hills, the attrition factors were both professional and personal and I have argued that, although teacher attrition is inevitable, particularly because of personal factors, it is necessary to re-envision attrition factors as a plan for retention. Two short-

term approaches were outlined to attend to the professional attrition factors with the aim of increasing teacher retention: community integrated induction and mentorship programming, and continuous and multi-year contracts are possible approaches to boost retention. Teacher education is one longer-term approach that would address teacher attrition from a system perspective. In all approaches, collaborative effort, engagement, and funding are needed from the federal government, local education authorities, and Faculties of Education if teacher retention in remote First Nation communities is to be increased.

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### Preamble to Chapter 3

The second article, *Teaching and fear: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, addresses how fear mediates teachers' experiences in Grassy Hills. The role fear played for teachers was an unanticipated theme in the data. I had expected to hear about issues that were represented in literature related to teachers' work such as wages, benefits, living and working conditions, access to professional development and teaching resources, and student behaviours. I was surprised and intrigued when fear surfaced as a dominant issue that many teachers discussed. I suspect that the fear experienced by those who were involved in the research was felt by others as well and may have deterred additional participants. During informal conversations, several teachers were interested in the research project but chose not to be involved because of "bad timing" or being "a bit too risky right now." It was these and other comments made during interviews and focus group that emphasized the magnitude of fear being experienced.

I have struggled with the data about fear since I collected it. I wanted to be sure that the fear experienced by teachers was situated and contextualized within systemic issues and the dynamics at play in the community. I have re-conceptualized this paper several times and attempted to utilize different theoretical frameworks to find meaning. I have realized that the data could be interpreted many different ways and what I have written about is only one interpretation that is grounded in my theoretical commitment to exposing the colonizing nature of the First Nations education system.

In the end, I think this paper has brought about more questions than answers but I feel they are questions that need to be asked, particularly because they are questions that

are often silenced. As I have reflected on this article, I have come to realize one of the limitations of this research. Had there been additional time and funds, I would have returned to Grassy Hills to ask more questions about teachers' fear and how the teachers themselves made sense of it. For now, I have written about and made meaning with the data I had. Due to the emerging recognition of fear in teachers' work and the limited existing literature in the field, I invite conversation, debate, and theorizing to move thinking forward.



### **CHAPTER 3: TEACHING AND FEAR: TEACHERS' WORK IN A NORTHERN ONTARIO REMOTE FIRST NATION COMMUNITY**

Fear is an emotion experienced in various workplaces (Kish-Gephart, Detert, Trevino, & Edmondson, 2009; Sutton & Wheatley, 2003), but the First Nations setting is unique because teachers' experiences of fear, surveillance, self-censorship, and silencing occur within a specific historical legacy of oppression and forced assimilation, and in a context of ongoing colonization. Using a case study approach that focussed on the nature of teachers' work in one remote First Nations community, I anticipated that issues such as wages, benefits, and working conditions traditionally discussed in the educational policy literature would become relevant, as would teacher concerns about student behaviours, curriculum, and lack of access to teaching resources. It was surprising then to discover how the role of emotions, especially fear, became an unanticipated yet dominant theme in the interview and focus group data I collected.

The evidence in this paper is drawn from a larger case study completed in a northern First Nation community in Ontario, which has been assigned the pseudonym Grassy Hills. I begin by providing some background on Grassy Hills, the schools, and the teachers, and explain how they are situated within the larger context of First Nations education in Canada. From there, I describe and organize the evidence about teachers' fears as it was shared with me through interviews and focus groups. I discuss the role fear plays in the experiences of the teachers, and what this reveals about the nature of teachers' work and, more specifically, the ways teachers negotiate the professional and personal elements of their lives. Finally, I address the impact of colonization on both the teachers and the community as a way to seek understanding of the complex dynamics at

work and make some suggestions about what is needed so all parties can work together more openly and co-operatively.

What follows, then, is an initial exploration of how fear mediates teachers' experiences of living and working in the North. Troubling questions are raised and I have given much thought to how to best discuss my findings in ways that would shed light on difficult matters in a fair and, I hope, thoughtful way. My goal is to add to and expand the conversation about teachers' work in First Nation schools. Ultimately, I believe that open and honest discussions can illuminate the complex nature of problems, lead to better shared understandings, and hence, to more comprehensive solutions. When it comes to the education of First Nations children, silence and avoidance are not viable responses.

### **The Community, Schools, and Teachers**

Teachers arriving to work in Grassy Hills find themselves in a small, isolated northern community, accessible only by air. Housing is shared with other teachers, so colleagues become housemates and students become neighbours. The boundaries of privacy narrow in the community as the professional and personal merge, and teachers experience daily interactions with their students both in and out of school. The two schools in the community, one elementary and one secondary, host a total student population of approximately 500 students, along with 30 teachers and 15 support staff. These schools are band-operated and have local mandates to integrate Indigenous culture into the curriculum. The schools are the hub of the community and play host to many events and meetings. In a locale as small as Grassy Hills, the entire community is connected to the everyday functioning of the school as most families have children attending one of the schools and/or family members employed by the Local Education

Authority (LEA). Education is a shared endeavor as every family has a stake in how the schools operate. As a result, teachers find their work situated in a complex environment that extends beyond the walls of the school but in more intimate ways than would be the case in the South.

Teachers are hired on one-year contracts by the LEA with the opportunity for renewal each subsequent school year. Without union or teacher federation involvement, teachers are entirely subject to the terms of their individual employment contracts which means they may have little or no preparation time, additional duties (such as fundraising) can be assigned arbitrarily and, in many cases, teaching beyond subject expertise and division qualifications is expected. Housing subsidies, benefits, compensation, travel allowances, and pension contributions are all presented in the employment contract and arranged through the LEA. Teachers must be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers and apply to the Qualification Evaluation Council of Ontario (QECO) to have their place on the pay grid established. All teachers, whether elementary or secondary, must purchase associate memberships with Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) in order to be evaluated by QECO but this membership provides no union services such as collective bargaining or professional development.

In addition to recruiting and employing teachers and educational assistants, the LEA is responsible for administering school funding, providing teaching resources, and managing school facilities and teacher housing. The LEA bears the responsibility for schooling but control is maintained federally through monetary mechanisms which provide inadequate and inequitable funding. Comparing funding levels for provincial and First Nation schools is generally acknowledged to be very difficult, but there is a high

level of agreement that federally funded First Nation schools receive significantly less funding per student (Assembly of First Nations, 2012). Funding shortfalls result in a lack of educational resources, facilities, and programming. For example, the schools in Grassy Hills, like most federally funded schools, lack libraries and librarians, technology, adequate physical facilities, and special education programming. The lack of resources contributes to an “Aboriginal achievement gap” that reveals how Aboriginal students are out-performed by their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010). This gap is greatest when on-reserve Aboriginal students are compared to non-Aboriginal students. The federal government also uses its power over the purse strings to insist on the use of the Ontario provincial curriculum as a condition of funding and, increasingly, demands the use of provincial standardized testing (Paquette & Fallon, 2010). Teachers in the Grassy Hills schools are expected to know and implement provincial educational policies regarding curriculum, assessment, and reporting, as schools may be subject to inspections by the provincial Ministry of Education, yet underfunding limits teachers’ abilities to meet student learning needs. This reality creates tensions and stresses within the Grassy Hills school system.

### **Method**

To explore my primary research question, “What is the nature of teachers’ work in a remote First Nation community?” I used a case study approach to acquire a depth and richness of data. Generally speaking,

A case study design is employed to gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved. The interest is in a process rather than

outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation. (Merriam, 1998, p. 19)

I adopted the specific case study approach outlined by Stake (1995), an important element of which is being able to define clearly what the case is and is not. My case is bound by an activity, the work of teachers. Although the work of principals, the LEA, and various other stakeholders comes into play, the primary focus is the work of teachers.

The case study approach outlined by Stake (2005) was adopted for both intrinsic and instrumental purposes. According to Stake, an intrinsic case study is one that is “undertaken because, first and last, one wants a better understanding of this particular case” while an instrumental case study can “provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization” (p. 445). Further, an instrumental case study allows the case to play a secondary role and facilitates understanding of something else. In the case of Grassy Hills the “something else” is the nature of teachers’ work in northern First Nation communities. Although intrinsic and instrumental approaches are often discussed in isolation “there is no hard and fast line distinguishing intrinsic from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose” (p. 445). Utilizing a case study approach for both intrinsic and instrumental purposes provides depth about the context and setting of the research while also allowing the work of teachers to be further situated and embedded within larger discourses in Aboriginal education. Furthermore, as Merriam (1998) points out, “Insights gleaned from case studies can directly influence policy, practice and future research (p. 19).

## **Participants**

Teacher participants were recruited through school communications such as email notifications and announcements at staff meetings. The call to participate in the research was open to all teachers working in elementary and secondary settings in the community. Participants included male and female teachers across a range of age categories and career stages. Some of the participants had begun their careers in the community and others had taught for several years internationally, provincially and/or in private systems. A total of 15 teachers, 6 elementary and 9 secondary, out of a possible 30, the overwhelming majority (14/15) being non-Aboriginal, participated in the study and thus most of the data is drawn from non-Aboriginal teachers which reflects the demographics of the teaching staff. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 60 plus and included both male and female teachers, who were most often from larger southern urban centers. The participant pool included both experienced teachers and new teachers directly out of teacher education programs. Six of the teachers had been in the community for more than three years and three had substantial teaching experience in First Nation communities but were new to Grassy Hills. Due to the sensitive nature of this research and to protect anonymity, detailed profiles of specific teacher participants are not included and pseudonyms are used to name them.

## **Data Collection**

Individual interviews with 15 teachers over a two-week period in March 2013 were used as the first step in data collection. Two focus groups followed the individual interviews with two and three teachers participating respectively. The interviews and focus groups were audio recorded and ranged in length from one to three hours with the

average length being approximately one and a half hours. Observations and reflections were recorded in a research journal throughout the research process.

### **Teaching and Fear**

Fear was the driving emotion articulated as teachers discussed their work. In many cases the fear expressed was in response to the possibilities of being reprimanded, losing their current position, or not having their yearly employment contract renewed. Sam, an early career teacher, drew attention to a clause in the contract often referred to as the “no cause clause” because it allows teachers to be fired without cause.

October 31<sup>st</sup> is the day that you can be fired for absolutely no reason, according to the contract. Step out of line and that’s it. It’s so scary, and you just try to not think about it because otherwise it would make your life hell.

The existence of this contract clause creates a sense of reduced security. And because the workplace is not unionized, teachers are put in a position where they are entirely subject to the conditions in their individual employment contracts on an annual basis. Laurie, a more experienced teacher who was new to the community, expanded on Sam’s comment and emphasized the lack of job security. “They could let anyone of us go right now. They could walk through that door right now and say pack your bags, and you have no recourse.”

Teachers described various situations where those who resisted or even asked questions were reprimanded publicly and, in one case, a teacher was asked to leave. The response to these situations was for teachers to “toe the line” and avoid any additional attention, as Bill, who had been in the community for three years, explains. “You have to fall in line. The teaching up here is not about being a teacher, it’s about going to work

and doing what you're told." This dynamic created an environment where some teachers felt unable and, in many cases, became unwilling to engage with the school community, including their colleagues, administrators, the LEA, and parents, for fear of losing their positions. Rob, a teacher who started his career in the community, explains how the instability and unpredictability of teachers' tenure created an additional fear of the unknown.

We thought we were living in tyranny. They tell you one thing, and then something else happens. There is no stable ground, and you're left with a feeling of like, what is going on? We are all left with constant fear.

In some cases, teachers began to consider how this sense of fear was having an impact on their practice and decision-making. Sam details his thinking process about whether or not he should ask the administration a question about his teaching.

If something needs to be done, then you debate whether you can do it yourself, and then you think am I going to get in trouble if I ask for this or do this? And then you decide whether or not you're going to do it and if the possible repercussions are worth it.

The fear experienced by the teachers had an impact on their ability to teach, to advocate for themselves and for their students. One teacher, Penny, an experienced teacher of First Nations students who was new to the community, talked about how fear in her teaching compromised who she believed herself to be and what kind of teaching she was working toward. Penny stated reflectively that, "living in fear to me is compromising your ideal self."



## Surveillance

While I was able to interview 15 out of approximately 30 teachers, fear also had an impact on how the data was collected and communicated. Many of the teachers were not comfortable with the formal interviewing process because they worried someone might see them talking with me, and they did not want to be seen in that situation. The impact of fear for the teachers also was evident not only by what they talked about in the interviews but also by the way they talked about it. Often, doors were closed and periodically checked for listeners on the other side. Whispering throughout different parts of the interviews was not uncommon and in almost every case teachers had very specific requests about where and when we met for the interviews.

One late evening during data collection I was walking back to my accommodations. In the distance I could see another person approaching. As we passed one another, the individual's pace slowed and I was asked, "Are you the one doing the interviews?" I replied "yes." The individual motioned toward a house and said, "You should come tomorrow night and I will talk to you." As we parted ways, the person turned back and said very quietly, "Just make sure no one sees you." This is just one specific example of the dynamics of conducting interviews in an environment where fear and surveillance are present. Teachers reported that they were being monitored, watched, and observed which contributed further to their feelings of fear. During an interview Laurie whispered, "Everything is being watched, like a big brother concept." More specifically some teachers talked about being monitored not only by school administration and the LEA but also by informants working with or for the administration. Sam, who arrived in the community directly after completing his teacher

education program, recollected, “There was definitely principal watch. Administration last year kept a very close eye on people, and there was, we believe, a teacher that watched other teachers and communicated to the principal.”

Teachers mentioned various occurrences where they believed their email was monitored. Many of the teachers who participated in the study asked to be contacted through personal email accounts or in person as opposed to using their school assigned email accounts. As Sam observed,

Even the thought of doing this [the interview] right now makes me fearful and so I am reluctant to do it. And again, we played it safe by e-mailing through my personal account and not my school account. I’m pretty convinced my school account is looked at.

This surveillance extended beyond the walls of school and into the teachers’ homes. Even private conversations were riddled with a sense that someone was listening or watching. Sara, a veteran teacher with international teaching experience, began to question her own sanity for always worrying and wondering if she was being monitored.

I can remember conversations that were conversations you wouldn’t want anybody to hear, [and] even in people’s homes, whispering. “Oh, better shut the windows,” you know? “Oh, did you hear somebody outside? Maybe someone’s listening against our door.” It’s like this is crazy. This is absolutely insane.

Fear, exacerbated by surveillance, creates a dynamic where teachers begin to find strategies to deal with the fear that floods into their teaching practice and their home lives and day-to-day interactions within the community.

Speaking up, speaking out, questioning, and advocating are typically part of the role of a teacher. In this case, however, teachers used self-censorship as a strategy to respond to fear and they censored one another as well as censoring themselves. Penny, a second career teacher, acknowledged how self-censorship debilitated her practice and her ability to speak up.

It is hard. There were a lot of things I disagreed with, but I just kept my mouth shut about it mostly. Maybe, voiced an opinion once or twice, but got reprimanded in some way for it, and then I just kinda' stayed under the radar.

Being reprimanded was often cited as being the initial reason to begin self-censoring and what followed was mistrust and a lack of connection to one another. Bill explored how surveillance and self-silencing were connected to the fear of getting fired when he said, "What happens is everybody starts watching their back, and everyone's afraid to know each other because they might say the wrong thing or do the wrong thing." Sara made the connection between fear and losing her position when she suggested, "You have to be very careful what you say and who you say it to, because it's gonna' get back to someone who's got some pull somewhere, and you're gonna' get fired."

The inability to trust colleagues and the associated fear resulted in teachers feeling disconnected, alienated and unwilling to engage with their school communities. Penny stated, "In school I walk on a bed of nails. At home I just live in a sea of discomfort. I've lived in abusive relationships and this is what I feel is happening to me here." The impact of self-censorship as a response to surveillance and fear are deeply troubling for teachers. Sam explained the conundrum of living and teaching in inequitable conditions,

while also trying to teach justice and equity along with modelling and teaching about responsible advocacy and community engagement.

And the worst part is many of us teach civic activism, and human rights, and equity and fairness, and it's a major component of grade 10 history and it's hard to sell it. It's hard to know those inequitable events happen and you go to your class and you go okay, today we're going to learn about the civil rights movement, and you're saying to yourself, man, I have a civil rights movement going on in my own mind. How am I gonna' sell this to these kids, when I'm doing this [keeping quiet] every day. I should maybe be doing something more, and speaking my mind, but I might as well just pack my bags because I will get fired for speaking up.

Teachers began to question their own sense of self. They faced strong tensions between what they felt teachers should be doing and the context in which they worked. The purpose of teaching and their roles in the community came into question and when the fear and self-censorship converged, their practice became greatly inhibited and they developed a deep sense of hopelessness. Bill, a teacher in the community for three years, asked, "Do I matter? Obviously I don't. In the greater picture, somewhere, I do, but not here. I know that. That's not even a question. It's shown to me day in and day out."

The impact of fear can also be understood through another mechanism teachers utilized to cope. Silence, whether it was self-silencing or being silenced, negatively influenced teachers' work, as they felt unable to use their voices, individually or collectively. Laurie responded very succinctly to silencing when she stated, "It's almost the rule not to ask questions, or you will be punished." Sara concurred. "I just shut up and

don't do anything, I just do my job and leave." Penny, directly linked her fear of being fired with her silence. "I don't foresee myself ever speaking out, because I'm just afraid of getting fired. Of losing my job."

Even in circumstances of injustice and unfairness, there remains silence, as Bill detailed.

Most of the time to be perfectly blunt and honest with you, we keep our mouths shut. If there is some major issue that you just cannot let go, we go to the principal and somehow it gets worked out. But most of the time even when we see things that seem to be unjust or unfair, we just bite our tongues.

Fear, amplified by surveillance and responded to through self-censorship and silence, are strong factors that influence the work of these teachers. In order to explain why teachers experience this fear, I turn now to argue that their work must be understood within the larger socio-historical context of Aboriginal education and relations between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.

### **Discussion**

To explain why teachers experience fear, I begin with the perspective of the teachers and the challenges they faced upon arriving in the community. I then position the teachers' work within a colonized reality, one that teachers do not appear to be aware of, and do not use as part of their frame of understanding.

Teachers arriving in Grassy Hills enter a setting that is completely new with respect to their personal and professional lives. Most teachers are hired from southern urban centers which means they arrive without knowing anyone in the community, without having ever lived or even visited an isolated community, and without the adequate education and experiences to understand community dynamics, educational

politics, and the colonized nature of the First Nation education system. Teachers find themselves adjusting to life away from family, friends, and networks of support and missing the shopping and recreational opportunities of more urban locales, while living in the “fish bowl” of shared housing in a small community.

Coupled with these new realities of personal life are the stresses and anxieties of starting a new job in schools which are under-resourced and do not enjoy the services provided in the large urban boards of the south, where most teachers lived prior to moving to Grassy Hills. Teachers are consumed with addressing immediate practical issues like creating a support network, planning lessons that meet student needs and incorporate cultural components, understanding cultural norms and the language, and finding their place in the school and community. At the same time, many of the teachers lack the background to reflect on colonization, assimilation, oppression, and racism. This creates a dynamic for teachers in Grassy Hills where there is much to learn about their role in the education system but their preparation is inadequate and their understanding of the context in which they work is incomplete. Teachers’ feelings of fear are real and their responses are personally debilitating and professionally unsatisfactory because many teachers do not grasp the impact that colonization has had on Indigenous communities.

### **Colonization and Schooling**

Colonization motivated original provisions for the schooling of Indigenous children and continues to shape education in the contemporary context. In its final report, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) observes,

For over a century the central goals of Canada’s Aboriginal policy were to eliminate Aboriginal governments, ignore Aboriginal rights, terminate the

Treaties, and through a process of assimilation cause Aboriginal people to cease to exist as a distinct legal, social, cultural, religious, and racial entities in Canada.

The establishment and operation of residential schools were a central element of this policy, which can best be described as cultural genocide. (p.1)

First Nations are still dealing with this legacy of genocidal oppression, the destruction of families and communities, the failure to respect treaty rights, and the loss of a land base. The colonial history of Indigenous education, particularly as reflected in the painful experiences of residential schooling, is well-documented (e.g., Miller, 1996; Milloy, 1999; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). “The Sixties Scoop,” a state-based action which removed thousands of Aboriginal children from their families from the 1960s to the 1980s and placed them in the homes of non-Aboriginal parents for socialization into the dominant culture (Johnston, 1983; Sinclair, 2007) and the continuing over-representation of Indigenous children in care along with the under-funding of on-reserve child welfare services serve as further evidence of the impacts of colonization on children, families, and communities (Canadian Human Rights Tribunal, 2016; Trocmé et al., 2005). Given that the on-going history of the removal of First Nations children from family and community has been so damaging, it should not be surprising that parents, the community, and other Indigenous educational stakeholders are vigilant in protecting the young. And perhaps this also helps explain, in part, the surveillance and monitoring that the teachers experienced.

As teachers grapple with the issues that dictate their work, they lack the tools to understand what they are facing and they interpret what happens through a filter that does not include colonization as part of their analysis. What the teachers do not appear to

understand fully is that the LEA experiences its own fears and is controlled, watched, and monitored by the federal government.

Currently, school systems for First Nations students, like the residential school system, are based in a Euro-Canadian framework which utilizes the English language as a vehicle to teach westernized perspectives (Graveline, 1998). Battiste (2000) demonstrates how the cognitive imperialism of schools reflects the privileges of colonial language, discourses, knowledge, practices, and culture. In other words, school systems, both provincial and federal, continue to colonize and assimilate First Nations students, families, and communities. This means the dominating ruling order holds and exercises the power and acts to impose so-called common norms and values to marginalize subordinate groups (Sears & Cairns, 2010).

Despite decades of effort to reclaim control over their own education, First Nations in Ontario, like those in the other provinces and territories, work within colonial structures in order to secure funding to support programming. However, that funding comes with a number of conditions. Teachers must be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers, which means that they have been through teacher education programs which are predominantly Euro-western in orientation. Many of the teachers are non-Indigenous and bring to their teaching specific ways of knowing and being that are generally not consistent with Aboriginal worldviews and serve to reproduce the inequities of the past. Additionally, the federal government exercises control through funding to enforce the adoption of provincial curriculum and testing programs. External control through certification requirements, testing, and funding creates a dynamic where a system attempting to heal is simultaneously being manipulated and oppressed. People within the



system, including LEAs, parents, band councils, and administrators experience difficulties navigating this complicated dynamic and have their own fears about losing funding support and experiencing surveillance through a range of audit mechanisms. For example, while teachers in Grassy Hills work on a contractual basis, and fear contract termination or non-renewal in the spring, the LEA has its own worries because the federal government holds the purse strings and only releases funding on an annual basis. As a result, the LEA is essentially forced to offer single year contracts in an attempt to keep budgets flexible and maintain the ability to respond to enrolment fluctuations and funding levels. Colonization still plagues the system of First Nations education and acknowledging this is vitally important because it is the landscape on which the teachers' work occurs. However, despite strong evidence that there is both a historical legacy and a contemporary reality of colonization, assimilation, and oppression, it appears that most teachers involved in this research did not understand the circumstances which prevailed with respect to the policies and practices governing First Nations schools, particularly with respect to funding, and did not critically reflect upon their position within such a system.

The dynamics at play for teachers in Grassy Hills are complicated and difficult to unpack but attempts must be made to confront the realities experienced by teachers and other stakeholders of the First Nation education system. Alfred, (2009b) states that “attempting to decolonize without addressing the structural imperatives of the colonial system itself is clearly futile” (p. 94). Unpacking the fear expressed by teachers and the role of the LEA is one attempt to expose the colonizing contemporary landscape on which First Nations education plays out. Alfred, (2009b) has problematized issues of

governance and leadership as well as power and colonial mentalities, and I will draw on his work to position the fear experienced by teachers and the role of the LEA within a broader discourse of colonization.

Just as the TRC identified the destruction of Indigenous forms of governance and leadership through cultural genocide, Alfred (2009b) emphasizes the need “to replace the dividing, alienating, and exploitive notions, based on fear, that drive politics inside and outside Native communities today” (p. 77). By working within the existing structures of the education system, shaped by the federal government’s control of funding, the LEA’s approach to leadership and governance begins to resemble that of the colonial state as opposed to a traditional Indigenous system. In Grassy Hills, when the LEA is afforded “a small measure of self-administration” (p. 84), traditional forms of governance and leadership are damaged. A colonial mentality, defined by Alfred as “the gradual assumption of the values, goals, and perspectives that make up the status quo” (p. 94), comes to dominate governance in First Nations communities and colonizing hierarchies of power are legitimized within the system, often through the manipulation of incentives such as funding, and the state’s framework for governance and leadership is adopted. In Grassy Hills, the LEA is, in effect, managing a school system that continues to colonize First Nation peoples.

The fear expressed by the teachers with regard to losing their positions and being reprimanded can be explained through the relational and social nature of colonization. As teachers experienced a colonized system seemingly invisible to them and began to witness the impacts of colonization in education without recognizing their root causes, they responded by disengaging through acts of silence and censorship. By doing so,

teachers worked to uphold the social conditions of their own production as opposed to taking collective action to make change. Disengagement on the part of the teachers demonstrates their inadequate understanding of the system in which they work and a compromised sense of the critical political work necessary in Indigenous education.

Both the teachers and the LEA in Grassy Hills responded to the negative consequences of colonization by adopting various measures of control and disengagement such as surveillance, censorship, and silencing. However, these strategies artificially position teachers and the LEA in opposition to one another and localize conflict, whereas a different dynamic would operate were the teachers and LEA to join forces and work collectively in opposition to government control and the overall agenda of colonization. While it is necessary to recall and emphasize how teachers and LEAs are implicated in or perpetuate the colonized nature of an educational system, it is important to recognize the resurgence of a move toward decolonization. Kanu (2005) reflects on current developments and explains that

The recent call ... to decolonize Indigenous education is part of a larger effort to reflect critically on the impact of colonization on Indigenous people, in particular internal colonization whereby carefully selected mechanisms, such as the subjugation of Indigenous knowledge and the use of colonial ideology to cultivate psychological subordination in the colonized, are employed by dominant groups to subordinate or regulate Indigenous populations. (p. 1)

At the same time, Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us to assess critically the “settler moves to innocence” (p.1) used as a means to quell settler guilt and deny complicity.

The fear teachers recount is yet another reminder that contemporary education

systems for First Nations children are deeply affected by colonization. Further unpacking the ways in which colonization impacts all agents in First Nation systems, including both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers, will be essential to determining how or if the education system can be decolonized.

### **Conclusion**

This research should be seen as contributing to demands for action in the field of Aboriginal education and efforts to further expose the contemporary colonized nature of the system (Battiste, 2013). I recognize that the data presented here might be taken out of context by ideologues or policy-makers intent on placing responsibility on the community or the LEA for producing fear in the work of teachers. This would be a misuse of the data. In order to understand the far reaches of colonization in First Nations education we must authentically expose, address, and engage with the factors that might inhibit an agenda to improve the educational experiences for First Nation students and their teachers. Thus my goal is to open a conversation about the fear factor in First Nations schools to help both teachers and communities better grapple with the dynamics at work in places such as Grassy Hills.

The work of teachers in isolated First Nation communities is complicated, particularly when the teachers themselves are unaware of colonization and lack the tools necessary to deconstruct and unpack their experiences. The fear of teachers in Grassy Hills can be explained only when it is positioned within a framework of colonization that explores the role of power, oppression, and leadership. Close attention must be paid to systemic and structural issues in order to ensure that blame is not placed on the

community or the LEA. Further research is required to explore if, where, and how experiences of fear are shared by other teachers in remote First Nation communities. In addition, the relationship between the teachers and the LEA must be further unpacked to gain insight into the LEA's perspectives and position. And finally, this research raises questions related to advocacy. Should teachers be advocating for themselves and the systems in which they work? What role might a union play in advocating for systemic change and improved conditions for teachers and students?

Colonization is an active and contemporary process and working toward a decolonizing agenda in Aboriginal education requires an understanding of how colonization continues to play out in schools and for teachers, specifically in remote First Nations communities. The fear of teachers in Grassy Hills has been explained within a framework of contemporary systemic issues of colonization. Part of the resolution includes dialogue and the development of a post-colonial relationship of mutual respect. The silence must be broken, the censorship exposed, and the fear confronted if we want to authentically address issues and concerns within the system of education that continues to fail Aboriginal communities, students, and their teachers. I invite conversation, debate, discussion, and theorizing around issues of fear in teaching and colonization to move ideas forward and seek better, more thorough understandings.

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### Preamble to Chapter 4

The third and final article, *Understanding roles and relationships: Teachers' work in a Northern Ontario remote First Nation community*, addresses the dynamics of teachers' roles and relationships with their students, other teachers, and the community in general. The focus in this paper is on answering one of my original research questions: How do teachers navigate the professional and personal boundaries of their lives as teachers in the North? Through the thematic network technique I used for data analysis, I generated four categories that help explain the ways teachers understand their roles and relationships. Although no teachers fell beyond the four categories, there were several who discussed the fluidity of their own understanding and the status of their roles and relationships. The categories are not static. Rather they are heuristic devices I have used to explain the opportunities, challenges, and tensions teachers experience as they work to understand their own roles and their relationships.

In addition, I have interspersed an autobiographical story from my own time teaching in a First Nation community. As I was interviewing the teachers and then later when I was reviewing their transcripts, I began to make meaning of their experiences in relation to one of my own. The skidoo story is interspersed throughout the final article as a means to locate myself as a researcher but also as a former teacher in a First Nation community.

As I reflected on this article as the last in the dissertation, I have asked myself some difficult questions. Despite experiencing fear and struggling with issues around retention, most of the participants spoke passionately about their connection with the students. When I completed writing all three articles, I asked myself, how is it possible

that teachers can be working in such fear, struggling with attrition, and then, for many, be so very focused on the relationships they have with their students? I realized when I started to ask these difficult questions, that I was beginning to formulate an answer to my original research question, which asked, what is the nature of teachers work in a remote First Nation community? The complexity of dealing with so many variables like fear and decisions about staying or leaving is just part of the puzzle. The relational condition of their work is another. I will explore this dynamic further in the conclusion.

**CHAPTER 4: UNDERSTANDING ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS:  
TEACHERS' WORK IN A NORTHERN ONTARIO REMOTE FIRST NATION  
COMMUNITY**

The compelling literature on the effective teaching and educational success of Aboriginal students is increasingly framed within the relational complexities of colonization, self-determination and decolonization (Battiste 2013; Brant Castellano, Davis & Lahache, 2000; Goulet, 2001). For teachers in remote First Nations schools, these relational complexities are lived out daily in the practical experiences of their lives and thus relationships with students, families, and communities become central to understanding the work of teachers.

Toulouse (2013) has argued that “relationships are the grounding element in fostering educational change for Indigenous students” (p.11) and establishing positive teacher-student relationships has been identified consistently as central to Aboriginal student success and positive school experiences (Collins, 1993; Fanshawe, 1989). More specifically, research confirms that effective and productive positive teacher-student relationships are characterized by (a) empathy, caring and compassion; (b) a conviction that every child not only can but will learn; (c) active listening; (d) confidentiality; (e) respect; and (f) trust (Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998). As Phelan, Davidson, & Cao (1992) observe, “students want teachers to recognize who they are, to listen to what they say, and to respect their efforts. In classrooms where personalities are allowed to show, students respond more fully, both academically and personally” (p. 696). Furthermore, positive relationships are especially important when working in First Nation educational contexts because the relational ontology of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning

make trust a central consideration between teachers and students, and with parents and communities (Ermine, 1995; Simpson, 2000; Wilson, 2007).

While there is clear and overwhelming evidence that positive, healthy relationships can enhance Aboriginal student success and create meaningful school experiences, relationships are co-created. Teachers must explore the dynamics of their roles within the classroom and the community, keeping in mind the context of colonization. However, Trotman & Kerr (2001), in a study of pre-service teachers, found that teachers draw on their own experiences to help position themselves as teachers and situate their understandings of education. When teachers draw on their own experiences, a filter is created that is imbued with expectations, definitions of success, their own educational experiences, bias, and stereotypes. As such, the teacher's filter may impede the ability to critically assess her/his role in dealing with issues of difference and may ultimately serve to reinforce the status quo. Although the teachers in Grassy Hills, a northern First Nation community, were not pre-service teachers when they arrived, they were beginning a new teaching experience and brought with them their understandings developed elsewhere, largely in the urban south. Through teacher education programs and their own experiences as students, teachers have been trained to value dominant western approaches over other ways of knowing, particularly Indigenous ways of knowing. So, how do teachers build relationships with students and community members who have a different worldview and different life experiences?

As part of a larger study focused on the work of teachers in a remote northern Ontario First Nation community, I found that teachers were actively engaged in a process whereby they developed evolving perceptions about their roles in the classroom and

community as they negotiated relationships. After summarizing the research method and describing the community of Grassy Hills to situate this research, I describe four different categories that emerged from the data analysis that represent ways in which teachers negotiated their relationships with students, with each other, with families, and the community at large. Better understanding how teachers conceive of their roles and relationships in a teaching context is an important and underrepresented component of the literature on developing teacher-student relationships, particularly in First Nation schools. When the roles of teachers are better understood, the development of better school dynamics through trusting relationships with students, parents and the wider community becomes more possible and may lead to improved levels of student success and teacher retention.

### **Method**

This paper reports on part of a larger case study that focused on the question: What is the nature of teachers' work in a remote First Nations community in Northern Ontario? Through a case study approach (Stake, 1995), specific attention was paid to the context in which teachers worked and how they conceived of their experiences both teaching and living in the remote community I am calling "Grassy Hills."

Interviews and focus groups were conducted over a two-week data collection period in March of 2013. Out of a possible pool of 30 teachers, 6 elementary and 9 secondary school teachers responded to a call for participants and were interviewed in sessions that lasted from 45 minutes to three hours, with the average interview time being approximately one and a half hours. Although 14 of the 15 participants were non-Aboriginal, none of the participants were originally from the community of Grassy Hills.

Following the interviews I conducted two focus groups, one involving two and the other three, teacher participants. I also kept a research journal throughout the data collection period to record observations and my personal reflections on the experience.

Confidentiality and anonymity were extremely important aspects of this research and to ensure identities remain protected I do not share specific or identifying information about the participants, school, or community. However, a more generalized summary of participant information will provide some background. Of the 15 participants, 14 were non-Aboriginal. Participants ranged in age from 22 to 60 plus and included both male and female teachers. The participant pool included both experienced teachers and new teachers directly out of teacher education programs. Six of the teachers had been in the community for more than three years and three had substantial teaching experience in First Nation communities but were new to Grassy Hills.

In places within this paper I will include one of my own stories, told in parts. From 2007- 2010, I was a high school teacher in a remote First Nation community and as I collected data I began to connect some of my own experiences with the stories and voices of the participants. The skidoo story (*included as italicized text*) will be interspersed in several spots in this paper to illustrate the convergence of the participants' experiences with my own. The autobiographical skidoo story serves as a means of locating myself within this research as both a researcher and a former teacher (Brockmeier, 2001; Bruner, 2001). In having this shared experience of northern teaching with participants, I would argue that I am accorded a special form of insider access to understanding and interpreting the experiences of the teacher-participants.

### ***My Skidoo Trip***

*As the winter began in the North, I started to notice people in the community preparing their skidoos for the coming snowfall. The community I taught in was isolated and had variable road access during the coldest winter months. After seeing everyone zipping around on their skidoos, exploring the area and going out ice fishing. I decided I wanted one too. And so I bought one. It was in less than ideal condition but nonetheless it served its purpose until one very early and very cold morning in February.*

*I, along with a few other teachers, had decided that we would set off one Saturday to skidoo to the next community (about 300 kilometres away) to visit some teacher friends. So off we went. Skidoos loaded with gear. Parkas zipped up and nothing but the open road ahead of us. About three kilometres into the trip I started to feel the brutal -40 degree weather cut through my parka. I remained optimistic as the sun would be up soon and an exciting day was ahead of us. As we passed the 20 km. marker, I saw smoke rise from under the hood of my skidoo. Not a good sign. Before I could slow down, I heard a loud snap and the skidoo stopped in its tracks. So there we were, on the side of the ice road, in minus 40 degree weather, in the complete dark, wrestling with the realization that none of us knew how to fix the skidoo.*

*At this point, it was decided that the people on the other skidoo would go back to the community to get help and take my passenger with them. There were no extra seats, we had no chains to tow my skidoo and since this whole trip was my idea (and I may have persuaded the others to come along), I stayed back with the broken skidoo, on the side of the ice road, in -40 weather, in the complete dark, absolutely alone.*

## Grassy Hills

For teachers living in Grassy Hills, work and personal lives become blended as they live and teach in close proximity to one another, their students, and their families. Teachers are often hired from southern parts of the province and as a result are visitors to the community, often leaving during school breaks, such as Christmas holidays and the spring break. Teachers share housing, so colleagues become roommates and students become neighbours. The connection with other teachers is strong because family support is not immediately available and colleagues become surrogate families. The beginning of the skidoo story demonstrates a key feature to living in a community like Grassy Hills, the need for connection. Living in isolation brings about an eventual desire to meet new people, connect with teachers from other communities, and see new places. In an isolated community like Grassy Hills where access is by air only, leisure activities are minimal so efforts are made to find entertainment like skidooing, fishing, and hiking. The beginning of the skidoo story details the isolation and cold weather conditions but also positions teachers as friends who spend time together outside of school, friends who often are from the south and are unprepared for the unique circumstances they will encounter while living in the north.

Running water is available in teachers' homes but it is not drinkable so regularly teachers and members of the community can be seen walking with jugs to the water plant to fill up on clean water that is used for cooking, brushing teeth, and, in some cases, bathing. Walking, for most teachers, is the primary mode of transportation and is often suitable because distances from home to school are short and living arrangements dense. Often the walk to school is not solitary but with other teachers and with students, as well.



The distance between teacher and student is narrowed with dense living conditions and a relatively small population. In the words of one teacher, “Everything you do and say reflects on you at school, in this community, because everybody knows everything about everyone, and you can’t do or say anything, even outside of school, without it reflecting on you in school.” The local grocery store is a hub of activity and often employs various students and family members so grocery shopping can also closely resemble an impromptu parent-teacher conference. Food security is a concern in the community with limited availability of fresh produce and high costs for all other essential items. The high cost of living, along with high levels of unemployment, compound conditions of poverty and many students utilize the breakfast program at the schools to ensure they have had something to eat before they begin their school day.

There are two schools in the community, one elementary and one high school, with a combined population of approximately 500 students. Teachers often work with educational assistants at the elementary level but support staff such as librarians and special education teachers are absent due to a lack of funding. Extra-curricular programs, updated resources, functioning science labs, and technology are a few of the elements lacking from the schools in Grassy Hills due to lower levels of funding for First Nation schools when compared to their provincial counterparts. As a result, teachers take on many additional duties such as fundraising, coaching community teams, and cleaning their own classrooms, as well as gathering and paying for many of their own teaching materials and resources.

Grassy Hills, despite social and economic challenges, is a culturally, environmentally, and linguistically vibrant community that welcomes teachers to become

involved in local events, meetings, and community initiatives. For teachers in Grassy Hills, work and personal lives are closely intertwined as they come to understand their roles in the community, and the lives of their students. I, too, experienced the interconnectedness of my professional and personal life when my skidoo broke down.

*And so I waited. I am not sure how long I sat there waiting but it was long enough for the sun to begin to rise. As I reached for my camera, I thought to myself – this is such a northern moment, the cold, the ice, the rising sun, the land – so majestic, I thought, and then I heard a noise far off to the north. It was a howl of a wolf. Wow! Then I heard another howl, this time to the south. I flashed back to being a child in Algonquin Park learning about wolves and remembered that there is never just one. So there I sat listening to the howls of the wolves around me. How would I defend myself if the wolves closed in? Should I run? No. Should I try to fend them off? No. It was a deep moment of despair. But then, in the distance I heard the roar of a motor and from the bush I saw a skidoo coming. Thank goodness, I thought.*

*As the skidoo got closer, I realized it was not my teacher friends who had gone back for help but someone else. The individual approached and got off the skidoo. Wearing goggles and a parka hood done up tightly, the skidoo driver was not identifiable but I said, “Hello, can you help me?” In response, I heard a roaring laugh and it sounded familiar. As the person took off the goggles and hood, I realized it was one of my grade 10 students named Mike.*

*After Mike stopped laughing at me, he said, “I might be able to help you.” He then proceeded to negotiate a few details of his participation in class, which included time in the “comfy teacher chair” and extra computer access after school. Once all the details*

*were negotiated to his satisfaction, Mike got to work. He asked if I had an extra belt (apparently that's what had snapped). I didn't. But he did. So prepared, I thought. Unfortunately the belt for his skidoo wouldn't fit on mine and so he swiftly pulled out a chain (again something I didn't have) and hooked me up to tow me back home.*

My role changed that day and so did my understanding of Mike. I began to experience a new type of relationship with one of my students. Many of the teacher participants shared with me their own student stories, some of tension, some of transition, and often within the scope of relationships and roles.

### **Categories**

How teachers navigate their understanding of their roles and relationships as educators working within an Indigenous context is the focus for the remainder of this paper. To detail how teachers understand and explain their roles and relationships I have constructed four categories to describe different phases teachers experience as they negotiate their roles and relationships with each other, their students, parents, and community members. The four categories should be viewed as heuristic devices and are labelled (a) pedestal people, (b) educational transitioners, (c) relationship builders and, (d) community integrators. The categories outlined below are intended to be signposts inviting you to explore the dynamics of roles and relationships for the teachers in Grassy Hills and communities like it.

### **Pedestal People**

Teachers' roles in the classroom and the community shape and are shaped by their understanding of knowledge as well as what they have been trained to think teaching is. The

influence of power and hierarchy became clear when one teacher stated, “I still see teachers as pedestal people. We are to be looked up to and admired. We are presenting the world to these kids. I have knowledge to filter down to them.” One teacher finished his interview by stating that, “My plan is to be the teacher that I would normally be anywhere else, and that is it. Take it or leave it.”

In a community like Grassy Hills, however, students often have strengths that are unknown to the teacher because they are not actively displayed or discussed at school, and may not even be part of a western conception of success. Essentially, student knowledge and gifts may not be revealed or reflected through the curriculum and as a result are not acknowledged in teacher assessments of students or their families. For example, one teacher commented that “the parents don’t seem to give their sons and daughters the impression that they, you know, value education or [that] they think they should stay in school and get their high school diploma and perhaps go on for further education.” This quote specifically highlights a Eurocentric way of thinking about success in school and life in general. The teacher does not acknowledge that education may be something more than schooling and is unable to recognize what other aspects of life might be of importance. As a result, teachers on pedestals establish boundaries that uphold and protect their understanding of the education system and their role as a teacher. One teacher explains that,

I had to essentially pretend that when I’m in this building [the school], I’m in a building that’s just like the south. I come in and I do my job. I do it the exact same way as I normally would, except when it comes to having conversations that are outside of school. I keep them to a very minimum. My time, like I do

homework study group kind of thing at 3:30 to 4:00 or even to 4:30. It's not a time to hang out, to just chill and listen to music and talk about whatever. It's time to do school work, and if you're not there to do school work, it's time to go home.

“Pretending” that their school is just like a school in the south is an attempt to maintain, if only in their minds, a system that they understand, and, more specifically, a role that they understand. Renegotiating their role as a teacher would draw into question their entire educational experience including their teacher education program.

For some teachers, the growth in their teaching and their ability to connect with students and the community is inhibited because they are not willing to unlearn the still dominant western conception of what it means to be a teacher, namely the person who is the central conveyor of knowledge and the authority figure who must exercise control and discipline in the classroom and who teaches a curriculum that does not often account for non-white perspectives (Fitchett, Starker, & Salyers, 2012; Gatto, 1992). A veteran teacher, who is well connected in the community and beyond the school, discusses the implications of this for community perceptions and the resulting impact on other teachers.

I have been here for a while and people realize I am not a white ass hole. They have seen so many white ass holes up here it would make your head spin. I would appreciate it if you quote that. [laughs] They screw it up for all of us.

In some cases teachers make strides to shift their understanding of the community and their students but position those experiences back within a framework where the role of

teacher is clearly defined as one based within the walls of school and where teachers should be viewed as authorities, not equals.

I did like a traditional goose-plucking and gutting ceremony at one of the student's houses, invited by that student, and the mother and what-not and the whole family was there. So you do get to know people on a much more personal basis. The only issue is that it does transfer into your classroom, so there is a higher level of say, viewing the teacher as a buddy, or I guess like a friend instead of saying this is someone that is a role model or in some terms an authority figure. Rather than this teacher seeing this experience as an opportunity to connect with their students and learn about the culture and knowledge valued at home, the teacher positions the experience as problematic because it could potentially damage the perceived authority or power a teacher should hold. The possibility of negotiating the power relation to break the binary of friend or authority is not acknowledged by this teacher.

Further, pedestal teachers demonstrate a longing for academically driven students who seek out and desire the knowledge and skills teachers have.

I just wish there was someone who was legitimately interested in something in class and raised their hand and asked questions, stayed after school, like ask "How do you write an essay? Can you proofread this for me?" and all those great things that learning is supposed to be about, is just not here at all.

In cases like this, not only do teachers want their skill sets, such as writing an essay and proofreading, to be utilized but they centralize these skills and what "learning is supposed to be about" as of most importance. Student interests only appear to be legitimate when they are within the realm of academic performance and the skills and interests of the teacher. Value is placed on

the final product, driven by an outcome, rather than on a process-oriented approach.

The nature of knowledge and who holds it is deeply entrenched in the philosophies and pedagogies of the pedestal people and they see upholding the structures to maintain their role as imperative to their work. These teachers go as far as to “pretend” they are in schools where teachers are authority figures, they work to uphold their perception of “normal,” all in an effort to resist changing perceptions of their own roles and ultimately their relationships with their students.

### **Educational Transitioners**

For some teachers a shift occurs. Critical moments or experiences can move teacher thinking away from existing perceptions of school, success, and authority to a strong realization that teachers need to change, that teachers are responsible for reconfiguring their own understandings to better support students. This is the transition point at which teachers confront the tension of knowing that a change needs to happen while not grasping how to realize that change. One teacher edged toward this transition when she said, “I think the way I teach now is not the way I was taught to teach. I had to do something different.” Teachers are beginning to acknowledge that what and how they were taught both as students in the education system and in their teacher education programs, may not serve the students of Grassy Hills. A teacher new to the community illustrated how she was in transition when she explained that it is important to “start going outside more as a teacher. The teacher has to change, not the community.”

Transitioners also mention flexibility as a general principle that is key to survival in Grassy Hills. “You have to learn to be very flexible. You have to be like an

educational gymnast.” By acknowledging that teachers must be flexible and must change, transitioners open the door to becoming relationship builders.

### **Relationship Builders**

Relationship builders demonstrate a commitment to establishing relationships with students to improve classroom conditions for both themselves and their students. Underlying the effort to reach beyond the walls of school and into the community and home life of students was a desire by the teachers to better attend to the curriculum, ease tensions in the classroom, and improve their own practice. Many teachers came to realize that through relationship building their role would change, their practice and pedagogy would improve, and they would find success in implementing the curriculum.

Every time you see the kids, if you make that effort in my opinion, to say “Hi, hey, how is it goin’?” Like I could tell you a lot about kids in different grades just ‘cause we’re always out walking. When we go for walks, we’ll stop, watch what they’re doing, talk to them, play hockey with them, show an actual interest in them outside of school. We see that they actually have life outside of our classrooms and then the kids start to see that we are not just gonna’ bail out, we are for real. I’m willing to just have conversations with them. There are so many barriers and once you just make the effort to actually break those down and talk to a child, and have a conversation with them instead of talking at them, there’s a big difference. Why would I just come home and watch TV when I can go out, see what else is going on around me? I want to know what’s going on, and I want to know what’s up in their life, so it actually makes it better for me to teach them.



Although the underlying commitment is strongly centralized around the curriculum, these teachers have also shifted their understanding of their role to be alongside students rather than positioned above them like the pedestal people. One teacher explained it this way.

My teaching, like I teach the curriculum obviously, but I teach my kids first, then I teach them the curriculum. I can see when a child comes in if they're having a bad day they're not going to want to do addition and subtraction and life cycles. They are not going to want that. They are going to want you to just listen. They are going to want to know that when they come into the class, that you will see and hear them. They (the students) are part of this environment, it's not mine, it is ours. And I feel that impacts the kids, like that makes a huge difference in terms of their learning, in terms of their coming to school, in terms of them wanting to come to school, and in terms of them feeling comfortable and gaining confidence.

Another teacher reiterated the necessity of establishing friendships with students that challenge their perception of teacher-student relationships in order to not only benefit the classroom experience but to also make the experience in the community "easier." Of course, tensions remained and considerable effort was made to distinguish among particular elements of relationships with students. This teacher spent time detailing what friendship with a student looks like versus friendship in the way "we use it."

I think because the fundamentals of teaching here are different than the south, and I was told this almost as soon as I got off the plane. I was told to be their friend, not their teacher. And as much as I hate that quote, I find it to be very true here. In the south I think it would be the complete opposite. So you get to a point where you try being a teacher, to whatever that means in the south, and it doesn't work

because your attendance will plummet and you are going to face much more harassment and scrutiny from the community, from the administration, from everywhere. If you think of it as the friend and teacher on a spectrum, if you lean kinda' towards friend, and I don't mean that as a friend the way we use it, but more accommodating and more personal in some way, then your life here in and out of the classroom will be much easier.

The relationship builders are dedicated to meeting the outcomes of curriculum and if doing so requires shifting their understanding of their own role and establishing relationships with their students outside the classroom, then substantial efforts are made to do so. Coaching community sports team, volunteering time for community events, fundraising, and supporting a variety of extra- curricular activities are additional evidence of the work taken up by relationship builders to better attend to their students.

### **Community Integrators**

Community integrators are invested in connecting their personal and professional lives by establishing lasting relationships with students, parents, and members of the community. Community integrators seek to build relationships without the direct intention of improving conditions in the classroom in order to deliver the curriculum effectively. Community integrators are invested in understanding the community and their students rather than seeking to be understood.

Action is a significant component for community integrators who explore how stories of experiences and actually doing things within the community provide opportunities to build relationships.

It is kind of the action of doing it. Even to have a story about doing it that you share with the kids. I had a canoe, yes, but if they've seen me in it, then we have something. You have a commonality or understanding and the kids all get excited. Go hunting and then you connect with the kids and everyone in the community because you have done it and most importantly you have a sense of what it means for them, why it matters, ya' know?

It is really so simple but not something a lot of teachers will do. We go for walks up the river with a lot of families and when we see the parents around town, we joke around with the parents and the connection is immediate. The kids see their aunts and uncles or their family members joking around with us and the kids are like ... okay, alright, I see you, my family talks to you so I will too.

Connecting with people in the community through action oriented and community-based activities is a nexus where people, language, culture, traditions, and ways of knowing and being come together. These experiences prove to be most fruitful for community integration.

The action-oriented and community-based activities are seen to have value in and of themselves and one teacher revealed the new understandings about education that community integrators develop.

What I really like is that band run schools are more sensitive to the fact that kids need time outside of school to learn. I know as teachers we are supposed to try and keep them in, keep them in desks, in classrooms, in the school but the kids don't want to be in all the time. They don't want to be sitting behind a desk every day and I think there is a lot of wisdom in saying we need to go and take them out

into the community. On school breaks they need to see the land and learn from the land. They [the community] don't put it all on our shoulders to do that. They are very willing to take their kids out and do those things with them and to teach them their ways. And then when it's time for them to come back to school, they are more ready. They want to be here. And that makes it more enjoyable for us, as teachers.

Seeing the community, families, and parents as part of the students' learning and education exemplifies that this community integrated teacher sees that other people and sites can play an important role in student learning, placing responsibility beyond the school, the curriculum, and the western conception of who a teacher can be.

Reflectively, this veteran teacher finishes an interview by saying,

And until we are willing to share, until we are willing to really include others, we are going to have it hard. Whether it is in education, teacher retention, child attention and attendance at school, it's gotta' come down to start including each other in the community.

Community integrators seek experiences and action-oriented opportunities to build relationships within the community for the purposes of integration and understanding but also point out the necessity for student interests to be met through an all-inclusive model of learning that involves parents and members of the community as teachers themselves in a legitimate and necessary role.

Pedestal people, educational transitioners, relationship builders, and community integrators categorically represent teachers' experiences as they work to understand their roles and their relationships with one another, their students, and in the community.

Although these categories have been isolated here for descriptive and analytical purposes, they should not be seen as independent of one another. They should be visualized as a set of overlapping, interconnecting, and non-linear spheres of understanding that teachers are exploring to position themselves within their classrooms, within the community, and within existing frameworks and philosophies of education, teaching roles, and relationships with students. What is most important about these categories is that teachers are always working within and between them. As one teacher said, “I would say that no outsider is really in a permanent position. Depending on the time, depending on the day, depending on how others are feeling at the moment, you could be ‘all good’ temporarily, then it all changes.” Transitioning between and within the categories occurs in response to the teachers’ perceptions, community dynamics, political movements, student dynamics, policy changes, and the general ebb and flow of school and staff morale.

### **Understanding Roles and Relationships**

Relationships among educational stakeholders are a key element in Aboriginal education, and this includes relationships among teachers, parents, community leaders, resources people and other educational stakeholders (Collins, 1993; Fanshawe, 1989; Toulouse, 2013). These relationships require a caring approach that is meaningful and aligns with culturally appropriate protocols (James, 2012). The day my skidoo broke down on the ice road, my understanding of my role and relationships shifted, and this sudden knowledge challenged my previous perception of my role as a teacher. I had learned through my own educational experiences that teaching was about control and leadership. But on that day my role and my relationship with my student changed. How I saw myself as a teacher and a visitor in the community changed. My student established

leadership and was in control and I realized I did not need the control I perceived to be of such value when I began teaching. The playing field had been leveled and I became a better teacher because of it.

Walker, Mishenene, and Watt (2012-2013), identify five tenets of a “welcoming environment” (p.3) for Indigenous students: (a) cultural and language based curriculum and professional development that is transparent in the activities of staff at school; (b) integration of Indigenous content with cross-curricular instructional opportunities where all students are taught this as core knowledge; (c) connections with the Indigenous community by opening up school facilities for extra-curricular events; (d) practicing cultural proficiency by having a diversity of Indigenous resources in the library and experiential learning applications; and (e) meaningful relationships between Indigenous students and their teachers that are based in authenticity and real life conversations. Each of the five tenets is relational in nature and involves the community, the students, and the teachers, requiring a closer look at how teachers conceive of their own roles. Of most relevance is the final point that calls for meaningful relationships based in authenticity and real life conversations. I would ask, though, in whose real life are teacher-student conversations primarily based? When my skidoo broke down, the authenticity of the conversation was within the realm of my student’s knowledge and my lack of knowing and lack of preparedness. In the northern Indigenous context, especially, what elements of teachers’ work facilitate the development of a welcoming environment?

The community integrators demonstrated a number of the tenets of a welcoming environment outlined by Walker, Mishenene and Watt (2012-2013). Specifically, the community integrators were able to value culture and language and see its role in the

students' learning both within school and at home or in the community. Also, the community integrators were able to develop meaningful relationships with their students through action-oriented and community-based activities, and this created authentic and relevant points of communication and interaction with the students and the community as a whole. Although each of the four categories I outlined offers insight into teachers' work, the community integrators most closely demonstrate an understanding of mutual respect and meaningful relationships with students and community. By doing so, student learning is better supported and a more positive school experiences is created for students and their families. The community integrators demonstrate a strong ability to build and sustain a welcoming environment for students. This raises a pertinent question: how can teachers transition from pedestal people to relationship builders, and then to community integrators?

### **Becoming Community Integrators**

If community integrators best demonstrate the capacities that the research confirms are most likely to benefit students, what practical options are there for teachers, administrators, and educational stakeholders to initiate a transition toward integration? I suggest four practice-based recommendations that can be taken up by individual teachers, small working groups, or entire school communities. In isolated communities, access to professional development opportunities is limited and often schools and teachers become responsible for setting out their own professional development agendas. As a result, the suggestions offered here are intended to be used at the local level and are aimed at facilitating transitions toward becoming community integrators. The four suggestions are

community developed orientation sessions, professional learning circles, Elder mentorship programming, and community-based activities.

Community developed orientation session delivered by community members would serve to orient newly arrived teachers to the community at large and to the families of their students. A community developed and delivered orientation session would create a welcoming environment for the teachers, allow them to meet people, and afford them the opportunity to understand the dynamics of the community. In addition, an orientation session would allow teachers to understand what is valued in the community such as specific traditions, ways of being, and the language. As a first collective experience in the community, an orientation session would emphasize to new teachers that their work is situated not only within the school but within the community, as well.

Professional learning circles would provide space and time for critical dialogue among teachers. Lead by principals or by teachers, learning circles would draw on case issues, readings, and discussion about relevant topics such as colonization and decolonization, and shared ideas about curriculum, pedagogy, school wide issues, events, and activities. This would be a way to initiate dialogue and support teachers in their own understandings about their role and the system they work in. It also would provide a platform for talking about and planning school-wide initiatives, especially as related to cultural activities and opportunities to bring the community into the school.

Elder mentorship programming would match teachers or small groups of teachers with Elders from the community willing to provide guidance, mentorship, and support. An Elder mentor would provide teachers with a connection to an important member of the community who could share specific teachings that would support the development



and growth of teachers. It could also bring respected members of the community into the school, thus strengthening the community-school relationship by demonstrating that teachers value traditional knowledge.

Community-based activities developed by students with the support of adults would showcase activities that allowed students to display their interests and expertise and teach their teachers. Events featuring language, traditions, drumming, dancing, feasts, sport, beading and other activities are all opportunities for students to share and demonstrate their interests and skills with their teachers. Community-based activities would create formalized opportunities for the teachers to interact with their students in the community in ways typically beyond the school curriculum. Community-based activities would build teachers' knowledge about their students, the community, its history, culture, language, traditions, and ways of knowing and being, and shift teachers' perceptions about their students' knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Some of these suggestions require funding and all need willing participation on the part of the teachers, the students, the LEA, and members of the community. Members of the school community, including teachers, principals, and the LEA could seek funding from various sources to create local professional development opportunities that would directly impact their own school community. Although full participation, willingness, and funding are not always in place, these suggestions are offered as starting points to initiate discussion, encourage the pursuit of new opportunities, and explore what works for each community and school.

What worked for me was taking risks, like the one with my skidoo, and in the end that experience began a transition for me.

*As Mike towed me back, I was so amazed at his composure and preparedness and most of all, his knowledge. After three university degrees, I didn't have the knowledge I needed. What I thought I knew, didn't count; it really didn't matter in that moment. But what Mike knew did count. This was the beginning of my new understanding about the nature of knowledge and of asking questions about whose knowledge counts and when. It was also the beginning of a new understanding between Mike and me and ultimately a new understanding of all my students and my role as their teacher.*

In one critical experience with my broken skidoo, the pedestal crumbled, and I transitioned to a new understanding about what my role could be and how I could better establish meaningful relationships with my students. I thought I was knowledgeable and prepared for my work teaching in the north. But in reality, I learned one of my most valuable life lessons that day and I learned it from my student. I learned to ask questions about the nature of knowledge and whose knowledge counts and when. I learned to question the authenticity of my role and what type of relationships would matter to my students. These simple questions reshaped my philosophy of teaching and learning and ultimately brought me not only to a new understanding of my role and relationships with my students, but also with the participants in this research. The recommendations offered above are intended to bring about new lines of inquiry similar to the ones my skidoo breakdown raised for me. Intentional efforts to assist teachers in isolated First Nation schools transition to a more integrated role in the community could potentially bring about more positive and successful school experiences for First Nations students.

## Conclusion

The work of teachers and how they negotiate their roles and relationships was the focus of this research. During the fieldwork, it became apparent that teachers were at various stages of understanding and questioning with respect to their roles in the school and community as well as their relationships with their students, the families, and the community at large. Trust, mutual respect, and a welcoming environment are all aspects of improving the school experiences of Aboriginal students. Each of these aspects are relational in nature and include the teacher. Literature has firmly established that relationships are vitally important for Aboriginal student success, and “the roles non-Native teachers play need to be discussed in order to be in sync with First Nations educators and communities” (Oskineegish & Berger, 2013, p. 114). By exploring how teachers conceive of their roles and how they negotiate their relationships, some much needed insight into the struggles, opportunities, and experiences of teachers’ work has been provided.

The ways in which teachers negotiate and understand their role and relationships in Grassy Hills has been situated within four categories to highlight and explain the dynamics of their work. The pedestal people demonstrate that differing worldviews about power and hierarchy converge in the role of the teacher. When the teachers position themselves as all knowing, it makes establishing authentic relationships with students more difficult because the relationships are always dependent on the teachers’ interests and skills which are normally within the realm of school and academics. The educational transitioners play a vital role in progressing beyond western conceptions of a teacher’s role. Educational transitioners demonstrate that critical realizations prompt questioning

which can assist in identifying a need to change and transition toward integration. For many the change is a shift in how they connect with students and how they re-establish their role in the classroom and community. Relationship builders establish relationships with their students to support an improved learning environment for both the students and themselves. To do this, teachers' roles are redefined to include connecting with students outside the classroom and around activities beyond the school. And finally, community integrators seek out action-oriented involvement within the greater community to find understanding through common experiences. Community integrators see the value in learning beyond the classroom and acknowledge that education can come from others in the community who have knowledge and skills to share. Thus the idea of who a teacher can be is more inclusive, education is seen more holistically, and relationships with students, families, and community members are valued for the meaningful connections and sense of belonging that is fostered. In these ways, community integrators move towards an understanding of Indigenous approaches to learning and, as teachers, model a practice most congruent with what the research literature suggests is the most efficacious for Indigenous student success.

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## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This conclusion serves four purposes. First, it brings together key ideas that tie each of the three papers together. Second, it identifies some implications of the research by connecting them to policy related recommendations. Third, I suggest future directions and next steps that result from this dissertation work and fourth and finally, offer some personal reflections on the process of bringing this dissertation to a close.

One primary question has driven this research. What is the nature of teachers' work? This question was designed to be intentionally open and allow for exploration and understanding, as well as the generation of new questions. I also asked, why do teachers work in the North? What contributes to teacher retention and attrition? And finally, how do teachers navigate the professional and personal boundaries of their lives as teachers in the North?

Through each of the three articles in this dissertation I have attended to various aspects of teachers' work. In the first article, issues of teacher attrition are explored through a narrative re-storying approach and I found that attrition is inevitable as a result of both personal and professional factors. I outline how some attrition factors could be re-envisioned as a strengthened plan for retention. Mentorship programming, multi-year contracts, and improved teacher education are policy related recommendations that could boost retention rates. While exploring other issues, an unexpected theme arose in the interview data about the fear experienced by teachers. In the second paper, I focus on the strong emotion of fear as it is experienced by teachers in response to concerns about being reprimanded, beliefs they are under constant surveillance, and anxieties related to the insecurity of employment and the potential non-renewal of contracts. Responses to



the fear by the teachers include self-silencing and censorship. I also suggest that the fear felt by teachers was, in a different form, also likely experienced by the members of the LEA given that both the LEA and the teachers are agents in a colonizing system and control over the LEA is exercised by both the Chief and Council and by the Canadian state, particularly through monitoring mechanisms such as inspections and the levels of funding. Despite struggling with issues related to attrition as well as experiencing fear, many teachers discussed their relationships and roles in the community. In the final article, the focus remains on the nature of teachers' work but looks at their roles and their relationships with students, other teachers, families, and the community at large. I developed four categories, as heuristic devices, to describe the different approaches teachers adopt with respect to their roles and relationships. Pedestal people, educational transitioners, relationship builders, and community integrators all offered insights into the various ways teachers see themselves in the community and the ways they establish and maintain relationships. Community integrators are most able to connect with the whole community and their capacity to develop integrative ways of belonging and understanding generated the strongest conditions for student learning. Teachers who are community integrators create a welcoming environment, connecting with students about authentic and relevant issues both inside and outside of school. The practice of these teachers aligns most closely with the conditions for success found in the research literature.

Although each of these articles focused on a specific issue or aspect of teachers' work, they are bound together by the relational condition of teaching and working in a remote First Nation community which is evolving and dynamic. Students, families,

teachers, the LEA, and the federal government are just a few of the stakeholders in First Nations education but all interactions among these stakeholders are relational in nature. So are the broader discourses that impact First Nations education such as colonization, the ongoing legacy of residential schools, and attempts to decolonize the system. The teachers are at the nexus of these relational encounters. The articles begin the process of capturing the complexities of working in an environment where teachers are attempting to establish meaningful relationships with students and the community, while also contending with feelings of fear, and the push and pull of their own personal lives with respect to attrition. The nature of teachers' work in a remote First Nations community is shaped by personal and professional factors and by individual and collective experiences. There are no simple solutions to the very real and difficult problems created by cultural genocide, intense poverty, and systemic, on-going colonization but throughout all three articles I have made policy related suggestions that might be considered to ameliorate some of the immediate tensions and difficulties facing First Nation students and their teachers.

### **Policy Suggestions for Local Implementation**

The three policy related suggestions below are based in practice, and can be implemented at the local level at little to no cost.

Mentoring and orientation programs for incoming teachers that are community-based and involve more experienced teachers and members of the community, especially Elders, would serve to support the transition of new teachers to living in the community and also orient the teachers to the school and its place in the community. Mentoring and orientation programming would assist teachers with community integration, and expose

them to learning about the language, culture, and history of the community. The new teachers would be introduced to and begin to develop supportive relationships with members of the community.

In the schools, teacher-facilitated professional learning circles (PLCs) would offer valuable professional development opportunities for teachers to share ideas about pedagogy and critically discuss their practice, build their cultural knowledge and propose positive changes and innovations for classroom and school. The PLCs could take the form of general discussion groups, learning sessions with invited traditional teachers, case study reviews, focused reading and assessment of specific books or articles, and shared viewing of relevant films. PLCs have proven effective in many schools and would provide teachers with shared experiences and an opportunity to learn from one another and make meaning of their experiences. In the process, trust and relationship building might occur among the teachers and the activities they engage in would almost certainly bring positive changes to school organization and programming by infusing new and innovative ideas for improvement.

Community-based activities developed with, for and by teachers and students would provide valuable opportunities for teachers and students to spend time together learning from one another about activities that would highlight students' interests and strengths as well as the community's expertise, culture and language. Creating opportunities for students and teachers to interact outside of the school would support the development of strong teacher-student relationships which the literature shows contributes to improved educational experiences and more learning success for First Nation students (Fanshawe 2000; Melnechenko & Horsman, 1998). In addition,

community-based activities can assist teachers in coming to realize the knowledge and skills of their students in the wider context of their world and expand the teachers' understanding of their students, their own roles, and their relationships.

### **Systemic Policy Suggestions**

Two other policy suggestions are more systemic and will be more difficult to implement. Continuing or multi-year contracts for teachers would improve teacher retention and better attend to the high rate of attrition. When teacher retention rates improve, school dynamics do so as well (Mueller, Carr-Stewart, Steeves, & Marshall, 2011). Students find more success because they can establish trusting relationship with teachers who return every year (York-Barr, Ghere, & Sommerness, 2007). In order for First Nation communities and their LEAs to be comfortable about offering multi-year contracts, however, funding support must be there. Equitable funding for First Nations education must be secured in order to improve the success and educational experiences of First Nation students in Ontario and across Canada. Without equitable funding that reaches the LEAs, First Nations students will continue to be disadvantaged and the difficulties created by high rates of teacher attrition will continue.

Teachers in many First Nation communities do not have the support of a union. I suggest that the impacts of union support for teachers in First Nation communities should be explored as a way to help teachers wishing to advocate for themselves and for their students. Admittedly, unionization is a complicated jurisdictional matter but it has the potential of strengthening the case for increased funding for First Nations as well as supporting teacher development at no cost to First Nations. First Nations and teachers who are collectively organized could likely work collaboratively for the conditions,

including financial ones, that would enhance student health, wellness, happiness, and success.

### **Limitations**

This research is limited in a number of ways. The time and financial constraints of doctoral research allowed only one trip to the research site. While at least one more visit to the community would have been helpful in following up with questions raised by the interview and focus group data, this was not possible. Interviews or discussions with the school administrators, members of the LEA, and Chief and Council would have offered a wider context for developing understandings of the conditions of teachers' work. Had it been financially possible, case studies of additional schools in NAN would have added an even larger and thus richer set of data. Although the time available for a dissertation has somewhat limited the scope of this inquiry, it has still been possible to raise important questions worthy of further research.

### **Future Directions**

A number of questions have been generated from my research and through writing the three articles, but I will focus on three areas I would like to explore in the future. The first is related to teachers' fear, the second to teacher retention and attrition, and the third to the role of teacher education.

The fear factor for teachers in Grassy Hills was, for me, the most unexpected outcome of this research. As a result, moving forward I will pursue a line of inquiry framed by the following questions. How do teachers explain their own fear? How do teachers understand or recognize fear in other teachers, and other stakeholders in First Nations

education? Do members of the LEA or other educational stakeholders experience fear and in which contexts? Why? Is fear an emotion shared with teachers in other First Nations schools across the province and country? If there are First Nations schools where teachers do not feel fear, what can be learned from those sites? As efforts to decolonize education are at the forefront of First Nation educational reform, I would argue that it is imperative that contemporary and ongoing colonizing efforts be acknowledged and exposed. Unpacking contemporary colonization is necessary in order to ensure that decolonization encompasses all elements of the system, including its teachers.

Although one article in this dissertation focused on the retention and attrition of teachers, I was concerned with the lack of quantitative data on teacher retention and attrition in First Nation communities. To date, there are no longitudinal provincial or national surveys of teacher attrition. Despite much of the literature making the claim that there are high rates of attrition in First Nation schools, and there were qualitative and smaller case studies to demonstrate this, I am curious as to what a longitudinal study of teacher retention and attrition in First Nation communities would reveal. Is the attrition as high as suggested in some studies? Are the same teachers moving from one community to the next? Where do teachers go when they leave a community? And how often do they return? A provincial or national longitudinal study of teacher retention and attrition in First Nation communities would help to address some of these questions and could contribute to a national strategy to better attend to teacher demand in remote and isolated First Nation communities. As a second line of inquiry related to teacher attrition and retention, the impact of short-term teaching contracts could be further explored to address why LEAs rely on single year contracts and what role that plays in teacher retention.

The implications of this research indicate a need to better prepare teachers for work in First Nation communities. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE) *Accord on Indigenous Education* (2010) emphasizes the necessity to improve teacher education with an aim to foster culturally responsive pedagogies. Much of the responsibility for developing and enacting culturally responsive pedagogies lies with teachers and involves their capacity to establish meaningful and authentic relationships with their students. In learning what the expectations are for teachers, teacher candidates must be supported in their initial preparation and through continuing professional development opportunities that attend to and support their abilities to offer culturally relevant and responsive First Nation educational programming after they join the profession. In addition, the move to decolonize education (Battiste, 2013) is at the forefront of First Nations educational reform and hard questions about the past and about on-going racism and systemic oppression must be confronted in Faculties of Education. How to best ensure that teacher candidates, most of whom are non-Indigenous, become allies in the struggle for decolonization and reconciliation is another research question I will pursue as a result of my research in Grassy Hills.

### **Reflections on the Integrated-article Format**

I feel it is important to provide some reflections on the utilizing the integrated-article format for this dissertation as it has posed some challenges for me and will be read differently from a manuscript format thesis. Although there have been several advantages to this format, I realize in bringing all the pieces together that it presents a somewhat fragmented view of a very interwoven experience. Although each of the articles is unique, the participants are the same, and their stories were artificially segmented for the

purposes of writing three different articles. Had I written a traditional manuscript I think the complexity of the experience may have been better represented. In addition, due to the condensed and concise nature of each article, much of the work I did preparing these articles is not explicit in the writing. For example, the epistemological, ontological, and axiological considerations made were not as explicitly discussed in the three articles as they would have been in a manuscript. Rather, in the integrated-articles, those philosophical considerations are more so demonstrated and implicit in the decisions made about research design and theoretical assumptions. I do, however acknowledge this is standard practice in writing articles for publication in journals. Despite struggling with these challenges, I have learned what it takes to bring complex and dynamic ideas toward concise and clear arguments and I will be very happy to be able to disseminate this research quickly.

### **Final Reflections on the Research Process**

Bringing this dissertation to a close has been a rewarding challenge. I originally set out to answer what I thought was a relatively simple question. In the process of designing the research questions and the project as a whole I began to unpack the complicated nature of teachers' work and the complicated nature of the First Nations education system. The question became questions and they were no longer simple. Not only was I seeking out answers to questions I had posed, but I began to explore why I was asking certain questions and not others and how best I could answer them. I began to assess how and why this research mattered and if it did, to whom was it valuable. As I worked through the research design, I was also beginning to understand my role in the



research process. I was negotiating my role as a former high school teacher and as a new researcher as well as a non-Indigenous individual in the field of Indigenous education.

Recently I heard someone say “seek understanding rather than to be understood.” This aphorism has helped me to think about listening and watching more than I speak. However, a full understanding is difficult to achieve as I realized when I needed to write and explain and make sense of everything I listened to and everything I saw in Grassy Hills. I have unanswered questions, I have additional new questions, and my understandings continue to develop. For now, I am satisfied that the voices of the teachers of Grassy Hills have been shared and heard; they tell one, albeit partial, story about teaching in the North. Moving forward, I intend to build on the teachers’ story to seek deeper understanding.

My highest hope for this dissertation is that initiates dialogue, brings about shared understandings, and rings true for teachers who have committed their careers, in whole or in part, to working and living in Canada’s remote First Nation communities.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Guide

#### Attaining the position

- Previous education
- Previous educational employment
- Application and hiring process
- Motivation and reasons for accepting the position
- Transition from home to school

#### Teacher Retention

- Perceptions of opportunities and challenges
- Critical moments
- Community connections
- Personal and professional impacts
- Motivation and reasons to stay

#### Practice

- challenges for teaching practice
- benefits for teaching practice
- changes in practice
- impacts on teaching practice

#### Navigating professional and personal

- Home and school connection
- Negotiating identities in work environments
- Impacts of setting and location
- Community involvement

- Extra-curricular participation
- Community connections and relationships
- Conflicts and tensions
- Union and federation considerations
- Overlapping realities of work and home
- Professionalism and personal time
- Staff relations and morale
- Student relations
- Leadership

#### Teacher Attrition

- Decision making
- Critical factors
- Impacts inward and outward
- Perceived challenges and benefits

#### Future Plans

- What is next
- Career outcomes
- Movement, promotion, opportunities for growth

## Appendix B: Ethics Approval

**Western Education**  
**WESTERN UNIVERSITY**  
**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**  
**USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS - ETHICS APPROVAL NOTICE**

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Review Number: 1302-2 Principal  
Investigator: Rebecca Coulter  
Student Name: Dawn Burleigh  
Title: *Teachers' Work in a Remote First Nations Community in Northern Ontario: A Case Study*  
Expiry Date: December 31, 2013  
Type: Ph.D. Thesis  
Ethics Approval Date: February 26, 2013  
Revision #:  
Documents Reviewed &  
Approved: Western Protocol, Letter of Information & Consent, Email Advertisement

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This is to notify you that the Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board (REB), which operates under the authority of the Western University Research Ethics Board for Non-Medical Research Involving Human Subjects, according to the Tri-Council Policy Statement and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario has granted approval to the above named research study on the date noted above. The approval shall remain valid until the expiry date noted above assuming timely and acceptable responses to the REB's periodic requests for surveillance and monitoring information.

During the course of the research, no deviations from, or changes to, the study or information/consent documents may be initiated without prior written approval from the REB, except for minor administrative aspects. Participants must receive a copy of the signed information/consent documentation. Investigators must promptly report to the Chair of the Faculty Sub-REB any adverse or unexpected experiences or events that are both serious and unexpected, and any new information which may adversely affect the safety of the subjects or the conduct of the study. In the event that any changes require a change in the information/consent documentation and/or recruitment advertisement, newly revised documents must be submitted to the Sub-REB for approval.

Dr. Alan Edmunds (Chair)

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*2012-2013 Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board*

<b>Dr. Alan Edmunds</b>	<b>Faculty of Education (Chair)</b>
<b>Dr. John Barnett</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>Dr. Wayne Martino</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>Dr. George Gadanidis</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>Dr. Julie Byrd Clark</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>Dr. Kari Veblen</b>	<b>Faculty of Music</b>
<b>Dr. Jason Brown</b>	<b>Faculty of Education</b>
<b>Dr. Susan Rodger</b>	<b>Faculty of Education, Associate Dean, Research (<i>ex officio</i>)</b>
<b>Dr. Ruth Wright</b>	<b>Faculty of Music, Western Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (<i>ex officio</i>)</b>
<b>Dr. Kevin Watson</b>	<b>Faculty of Music, Western Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (<i>ex officio</i>)</b>

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The Faculty of Education    Faculty of Education Building  
1137 Western Rd.  
London, ON    N6G 1G7

Copy: Office of Research Ethics

## **Appendix C: Letter of Information**

Teachers' work in a remote First Nations community in northern Ontario: A case study

### **Introduction**

My name is Dawn Burleigh and I am a PhD student at the Faculty of Education at Western University. I am currently conducting research into the nature of teachers' work in a remote Aboriginal community and would like to invite you to participate in this study.

### **Purpose of the study**

The aims of this study are to better understand the complexities about the nature of teachers' work in Aboriginal community contexts and better understand the issues around teacher retention and attrition to remote Northern Ontario. This study will involve a minimum of ten to twelve participants.

### **If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to participate in a one hour interview that can be arranged at a location and time of your convenience. You will also be invited to participate in a focus group with 3 – 4 other teachers that will take approximately one to two hours and will be arranged in a mutually agreeable location and time. You will also be asked if you are willing to allow for classroom observation.

### **Confidentiality**

The information collected will be used for research purposes only, and neither your name nor information which could identify you will be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. In order to protect your confidentiality and anonymity in this study, all participant names and place locations will be removed from the interviews once collected. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed and then all digitally recorded interviews will be permanently erased. Data will be stored in a locked office. Access to the data will be restricted to me and my supervisory committee. Published results will be made available to participants on completion of the study.

### **Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary and open to all teachers residing in the community. You will be given a 20 dollar gift card to the Northern Store as an honourarium for your

time. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time with no effect on your or employment status.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dawn Burleigh or Dr. Rebecca Coulter.

This letter is yours to keep for future reference.

[Signature]

## Curriculum Vitae

**NAME:** BURLEIGH, Dawn, V.

**STATUS:** Assistant Professor, The University of Lethbridge.

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### FORMAL EDUCATION

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<b>Degree</b>	<b>University</b>	<b>Department</b>	<b>Year</b>
Ph.D.	University of Western Ontario	Education	2010-Present
M.Ed.	Lakehead University	Education	2007
B.Ed.	Lakehead University	Education	2005
Honours B.A.	University of Western Ontario	Geography	2004

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### EMPLOYMENT HISTORY

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<b>Date</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Faculty/Department/Institution</b>
2014-present	Assistant Professor	Faculty of Education University of Lethbridge
2014	Limited Duties Instructor	Faculty of Education, Graduate University of Western Ontario
2012-2014	Research Associate	CAMH, Centre for Prevention Science University of Toronto
2012-2014	Limited Duties Instructor	Faculty of Education, Pre-service University of Western Ontario
2011-2012	Teaching Assistant	Faculty of Education, Pre-service University of Western Ontario
2010-2011	Research Assistant	Faculty of Education University of Western Ontario
2008-2010	Teacher & Co-ordinator	Adult Education Program Attawapiskat Ed. Authority
2007-2010	Teacher	Secondary School Attawapiskat Ed. Authority
2007	Research Assistant	Faculty of Education Lakehead University



2006-2007	Teaching Assistant	Faculty of Education Lakehead University
2006	Lead Literacy Teacher	Lieutenant Governor's Aboriginal Literacy Summer Program

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## HONOURS AND AWARDS

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USC Teaching Honour Roll: Award of Excellence, Western University	2011/2012, 2012/2013
Ontario Graduate Scholarship (with distinction)	2013-2014
Northern Scientific Training Program Travel Award	2012-2013
University Student's Council Teaching Honour Role: Award of Excellence	2011-2012
Ontario Graduate Scholarship	2011-2012
Omushkego Education Teaching Excellence Award	2007/2008, 2009/2010

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## RESEARCH

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### Areas of Research Interest

- Aboriginal education, leadership, and policy
- Understanding the work of teachers in remote First Nations communities
- Teacher education
- Qualitative research methodologies (e.g., narrative inquiry, auto-ethnography, grounded theory, Indigenous approaches)

## Research Funding

Year	Source	Type	Amount	PI	Purpose
2010-2014	The University of Western Ontario	Western Graduate Research Scholarship	10,000/year x 4 years	<b>Burleigh, D</b>	Support graduate work for the duration of the PhD program.
2013-2014	Ontario Graduate Scholarship (with distinction)		\$16,500.00	<b>Burleigh, D</b>	Teachers' work in remote First Nations Communities in Northern Ontario: A Case Study.
2012-2013	Northern Scientific Training Program	Travel Award	\$1,750.00	<b>Burleigh, D</b>	Support travel for field work in remote Northern Ontario.
2011-2012	Ontario Graduate Scholarship		\$15,000.00	<b>Burleigh, D</b>	Living and Teaching in a Remote First Nations Community in Northern Ontario.

## PUBLICATIONS

### Key

**PA:** *Principal Author*; **C-PA:** *Co-Principal Author*; **C:** *Collaborator*;

### Articles in Refereed Journals: (3)

Crooks, C.V., **Burleigh, D.**, Sisco, A. (2015). Promoting First Nation, Metis, and Inuit youth wellbeing through culturally-relevant programming: The role of cultural connectedness and identity. *International Journal of Child and Adolescent Resilience* 3, 101 – 116. **C-PA**

Crooks, C.V., **Burleigh, D.**, Snowshoe, A., Lapp, A., Hughes, R., Sisco, A. (2015). A case study of culturally relevant school-based programming for First Nations youth: Improved relationships, confidence and leadership, and school success. *Advances in School Mental Health Promotion*. **C-PA**

Gilles, C., **Burleigh, D.**, Showshoe, A., & Werner, D. (2014). Walking in Circles: Self-location in Indigenous Youth Violence Prevention Research. *First Nations Perspectives: The Journal of the MFNERC*. **C-PA**

**Burleigh, D., & Burm, S. (2013).** Unpacking our White Privilege: Reflecting on our Teaching Practice. *in Education*. 19(2). **C-PA**

**Professional Publications: (3)**

**Burleigh, D. (2014).** How a Solution Becomes the Problem: Teach for Canada and First Nations Schools. *Education Forum*, 41(2). **PA**

**Burleigh, D. (2014).** A Letter to Teach for Canada Applicants. *Our Schools Our Selves: The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, 23(3). **PA**

**Burleigh, D. & Burm, S. (2012).** Teaching north of 50. *Education Forum* 38(2), 20-22. **C-PA**

**Professional Reports: (7)**

*School Program Evaluation: Opokaa'sin Early Intervention Society, p. 8-9.* April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program  
Reviewer: Instructional Programming

*School Program Evaluation: Kainai Board of Education (KBE) Combined, p. 150-154.*  
April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program  
Reviewer: Instructional Programming

*School Program Evaluation: Kainai Alternate Academy (KBE), p. 54-55.* April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program  
Reviewer: Instructional Programming

*School Program Evaluation: Aahsaopi Elementary School (KBE), p. 75-76.* April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program  
Reviewer: Instructional Programming

*School Program Evaluation: Kainai High School (KBE), p. 72-73.* April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program  
Reviewer: Instructional Programming

*School Program Evaluation: Saipoyi Community School (KBE), p. 81-83.* April 1, 2015  
Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program  
Reviewer: Instructional Programming

*School Program Evaluation: Tatsikiisaapo'p Middle School (KBE)*, p. 71-73. April 1, 2015

Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program

Reviewer: Instructional Programming

**Curriculum Development: (1)**

**Burleigh, D.**, Hughes, R., & Brunette-Debassige, C. *Circles of Supports*. London, ON: CAMH Centre for Prevention Science. 2013-2014

**Presentations at Peer Reviewed Conferences: (12)**

**Burleigh, D.** (2015). Fear and silence: A case study of Teachers' work in a remote First Nations community.

Canadian Society of Studies in Education (CSSE)

Ottawa, ON, Canada, May 30 - June 3, 2015.

Burm, S., & **Burleigh, D.** Unpacking our white privilege: A narrative inquiry into the experiences and challenges of teaching and living in a Northern Ontario First Nations community.

Canadian Society of Studies in Education (CSSE)

Ottawa, ON, Canada, May 30 - June 3, 2015.

**Burleigh, D.** (2015). Teaching, fear and whiteness: A case study of Teachers' work in an Indigenous community.

Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI),

Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA, May 21-24, 2015.

**Burleigh, D., & Burm, S.** (2015). Stories of practice: Untold narratives of teaching in Indigenous contexts.

Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI),

Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA, May 21-24, 2015.

**Burleigh, D.** (2014). Teachers' work in a remote First Nations community in Northern Ontario: A case study.

Canadian Society of Studies in Education (CSSE)

St. Catharines, ON, Canada, May 24 -28, 2014.

**Burleigh, D., & Burm, S.** (2014). Unpacking our white privilege: Reflecting on our teaching practice.

Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI),

Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA, May 21-24, 2014.

**Burleigh, D.** (2014). Beyond the classroom: A case study of Teachers' work in a remote First Nations community.

Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI),  
Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA, May 21-24, 2014.

Burm, S., & **Burleigh, D.** (2014). A narrative inquiry into the unspoken stories of our practice as Teachers.

International Society for Educational Biography  
Annual Conference, Toronto, ON, April 24 - 26, 2014.

**Burleigh, D.** (2013). School Based Violence Prevention Programs.

Ontario Native Education Counsellors Association Annual Conference,  
Sault St. Marie, ON, Canada, May 26-28, 2013.

**Burleigh, D.**, & Burm, S. Teaching and White Privilege: Narrative reflections on our practice.

Ninth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry (ICQI),  
Urbana- Champaign, Il., USA, May 15-18, 2013.

**Burleigh, D.**, & Burm, S. (2012). Unpacking our white privilege: Decolonizing our teaching practice.

Presentation at the Eighth Annual Aboriginal Storyteller's Conference,  
Buffalo, NY, USA, April 2012.

**Burleigh, D.** (2012). Theoretical and Methodological Considerations: Recruitment, Retention and Attrition of Teachers in Remote First Nations Communities in Ontario.

Canadian Society for Studies in Education (CSSE),  
Waterloo, ON, Canada, May 26 – 30, 2012.

### **Symposia/Seminars: (1)**

**Burleigh, D.** (2011). Promises of Literacy: An Aboriginal Literacy Initiative. Poster presentation at Research Day, Western University, London, ON.

### **Invited Addresses: (1)**

**Burleigh, D.**, & Burm, S. (2011, 2012, 2013) Teaching in Ontario's North: Experiences, Challenges, and Opportunities, Aboriginal Education Day, Faculty of Education, Western University, London, ON.

### **Media: (1)**

A Public Education TV Series – Interviewed and recorded while teaching  
<http://www.apubliceducation.ca/index.php/current-video-features?videoid=OpUmwmZzFgg>

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**TEACHING**


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Graduate Courses:

Instructor, Educational Leadership: 2014  
 Special Topics in Educational Policy Studies: Becoming Educational Leaders  
 (ED 9688L), Western University

Instructor, Educational Leadership: 2014  
 Reading Research: Critical Approaches for Educators  
 (ED 9587), Western University

Pre-service Courses:

Principles of Curriculum and Instruction 2016  
 University of Lethbridge  
 Principles of Curriculum and Instruction for Majors,  
 Native Education (ED 3601) 2015 & 2016  
 University of Lethbridge

Issues in Native Education, (ED 4729) 2015  
 University of Lethbridge

Independent Study, (ED 4990) 2015  
 Native Education: Special Issues in Curriculum and Instruction  
 University of Lethbridge

Professional Semester 2, Student Teacher Supervision 2015  
 University of Lethbridge

Professional Semester 1, Student Teacher Supervision 2014  
 University of Lethbridge

Instructor, Teaching Aboriginal Students (ED 5423) 9 sections 2012-2014  
 Western University

Teaching Assistant, Teaching Aboriginal Students (ED 5423), 7 sections, 2011-2012  
 Western University

Units/Lectures

*FNMI Education Workshops, (7)* 2014  
 Workshop Facilitator, University of Lethbridge

*Teaching in a Remote First Nations Community: My Experiences* (ED 5423) 2014  
Guest Lecturer, Western University

*Equity and Social Justice: Contemporary Issues in Teaching Aboriginal Students*, (ED 5424) 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, Guest Lecturer with S. Burm, Western University

*A Case Study of Aboriginal Education: Perspectives on Schooling*, (ED 2200)  
2013, Guest Lecturer, Western University

*Writing for Success; Technology Students in Education*, (ED5310)  
2013, Guest Lecturer, Western University

*Teaching First Nation Students in Ontario*, (ED 5310)  
2012, Guest Lecturer, Western University

*First Nations Community Schools in Ontario: Experiences, Challenges and Opportunities*, (ED 5423)  
2011, 2012, Guest Lecturer, Western University

*Teaching in Ontario's North: Experiences, Challenges, and Opportunities*, (ED 5435)  
2011, Guest Lecturer with S. Burm, Western University

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## SERVICE

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### Faculty

Aboriginal Education Curriculum Committee, University of Lethbridge	2015-2016
Aboriginal Studies, Education Committee, University of Lethbridge	2015-2016
BEd PSI Curriculum Redesign Committee, University of Lethbridge	2015-2016
Curriculum Committee, University of Lethbridge	2015-2016
Aboriginal Education Curriculum Committee, University of Lethbridge	2014-2015
Aboriginal Studies, Education Committee, University of Lethbridge	2014-2015
FNMI Centre Director Selection Committee, University of Lethbridge	2014-2015
Secondment Selection Committee, University of Lethbridge	2014-2015
BEd PSI Curriculum Redesign Committee, University of Lethbridge	2014-2015
PhD Mentorship Program Co-ordinator, Western University	2012-2013
Doctoral Seminar Series Committee Member, Western University	2011-2012
PhD Representation Committee Member, Western University	2010-2012
Graduate Student Mentor, Faculty of Education, Western University	2011-2014
Symposium Committee, Research in Education, Western University	2010-2011

External

School Review Team Member, Report Writer, Kainai Board of Education Lead Reviewer: Blackfoot Culture and Language Program Reviewer: Instruction Programming	2014-2015
Student Member, Promoting Relationship and Eliminating Violence Network (PREVNet)	2012-14
Student Member, Canadian Prevention Science Cluster, SSHRC	2012-2014
Literature Review Writer, Cornerstone Concepts Aboriginal Family Violence	2012
Discussion Facilitator, Centre for Diversity and Leadership Understanding Equity and Engagement Conference	2012
Report Writer, Indigenous Education Coalition Culturally Appropriate Assessment Conference	2011

Other

Reviewer, <i>in education</i>	2013
Reviewer, Canadian Committee of Graduate Students in Education	2011, 2012
Member, Canadian Society for Studies in Education	2011-present
Member, Canadian Association for Teacher Education	2013-present
Member, Canadian Association for the Study of Education Administration	2011-present
Member, Canadian Association for Studies in Indigenous Education	2011-present
Member, Ontario College of Teachers	2006-2015

**Additional Professional Development**

Eleventh International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Conference Urbana-Champaign, IL Publishing a Qualitative Study	2015
Tenth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Conference Urbana- Champaign, IL Writing Auto-ethnography and Narrative in Qualitative Research	2014
Ninth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry Conference, Urbana-Champaign, IL. Grounded Theory Methodologies for Social Justice Projects, Workshop	2013



Canadian Prevention Science Cluster, Student Meeting, London, Ontario Social Media and Sexual Violence	2013
Promoting Mental Health and Preventing Bullying PREVNet Annual Conference Toronto, Ontario	2013
Canadian Prevention Science Cluster, Student Meeting, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Indigenous Methodologies	2012
Ontario Education Research Symposium, Student Guest Toronto, Ontario	2012
Creating Healthy Relationships to Prevent Bullying PREVNet Annual Conference Toronto, Ontario	2012