

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE POLICY AND PRACTICE: BELIEFS OF TEACHERS
FROM THE NASKAPI NATION OF KAWAWACHIKAMACH

By

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Abstract

Indigenous languages are a means of passing on Indigenous worldviews, ways of knowing and ways of being throughout the globe (Simpson, 2004). However, Indigenous languages are declining in use or are endangered due to historical, social and political influences. Saving Indigenous languages is critical for ensuring the protection of the cultural identity and dignity of Indigenous people, and to safeguarding their traditional knowledge (Battiste, 2013; UN, 2008). While researchers have pointed to significant educational implications for Indigenous peoples that are linked with effective revitalization work (Ball, 2007; Battiste, 2002; Little Bear, 2009), less is understood of Indigenous teachers' perceptions of Indigenous language policies and practices that are in the schools where they are doing the work of revitalization. The purpose of this study is to investigate Naskapi teachers' (Naskapi members from community who teach either Naskapi or in English) beliefs on Indigenous language policy and practice at Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (JSMS), where Indigenous language is spoken and used for teaching and learning in the early grades. This qualitative project used Indigenous research methodologies and an Indigenous lens in order to gain insight of the participants. Through conversational methods (Kovack, 2010) such as the use of talking circles, orality was honoured (Battiste, 2000; Kovach, 2010). This research identifies five themes: two-worlds, elder presence, the land as a classroom, value of language, and curriculum and language development in relation to material and space. The first theme of "two-worlds" is an overarching theme that describes the idea that under one roof within the school, there are two worlds. The four other themes provide the specific examples of the impact of the two-world divide in the schools.

Acknowledgments

Elders tell us that our paths have been chosen by the Creator before we are born. The Creator sees a void and it directs us to fill it. The path our Creator has chosen for me is Indigenous education.

The path I walk today was obliquely shaped by my late grandparents: Baptiste and Grace; Joseph and Elizabeth. My father's parents were the product of the residential school system, which was a system designed to remove their culture from them under the pretext of education. My mother's parents were richly immersed in their culture without state interference. Each set of grandparents taught their respective values to my parents, Ruby and Sandy, in slightly different degrees. The fusion of these values merged into a heavy immersion with my Indigenous language and culture in a northern Naskapi community as I was growing up. My father wanted to restore our rich Indigenous culture in me which was denied to his parents. My mother wanted to continue to strengthen in me the vast richness of our culture. Thanks in large part to my parents, my grandparents, and to my extended family, today I walk proudly as an Indigenous mother, woman, educator and researcher whose voice and message will continue to be strong. It is now my turn to take up the torch to continue charting a path for my daughter, and for my Indigenous brothers and sisters, so that they too, will walk proudly in their respective Creator-guided journeys.

I acknowledge my daughter Jobena, my parents Ruby and Sandy, my sisters Glenda and Jessica, my late brother Kenneth, extended family, friends, and supervisor who have supported me throughout this endeavour.

I dedicate my research to the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach. Our Naskapi children and youth are our future; I hope that this paper makes one understand the importance in continuing to challenge what lies ahead, and more importantly, to bring about a balance between Indigenous and Western way of thinking, learning, and seeing.

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Indigenous Language Policy and Practice:

Beliefs of Teachers from the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach

We need to make progress on the revitalization and the recovery of our original languages, our Indigenous languages, the languages that define our nationhood, they shape our thoughts and ideas, they are connected to ceremonies; ceremony - language, language - ceremony. They describe our relationship to the world and our worldview. Everything around us, how we see each other, everything that is sacred. Our young people walk in both worlds...You need both to walk in balance.

National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Perry Bellegarde, commenting on the Canadian Government announcement in 2016 of an Indigenous Languages Act

(Pedwell & Kirkup, 2016)

Introduction

Indigenous languages have been used for thousands of years to pass on Indigenous worldviews, ways of knowing and ways of being throughout the globe (Simpson, 2004). Growing up in Kawawachikamach, I got to experience life where my Naskapi worldview, ways of knowing and teachings were shaped by the Naskapi language. Many of my family weekends were spent out on the boreal land where my nomadic Naskapi ancestors lived. On every trip, I learned something new about my language, culture, and traditions. These family gatherings were moments rich in laughter, wild food, and conversations in our language, where stories and legends were told by family members, and where respect for oneself, others and Mother Earth was present. The caribou, which my nomadic people have followed for millennia, was the root of learning that has now become part of my identity. Language and culture were not separate; my culture was embedded in my language, allowing me to be the fluent speaker I am today.

Unfortunately, Naskapi is like other Indigenous languages, some of which face a decline in use or are endangered due to historical, social and political influences (AFN, 2007; Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Hagege, 2009; Guèvremont & Kohen, 2012; Little Bear, 2009). The legacy of having languages strategically and systematically denied through colonial government control of policies on education can be argued to display racist colonial policies. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada (2015a) reported that more than 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children were placed in residential schools, often against their parents' wishes. In these schools, many children were forbidden to speak their language and practice their own culture, which is considered cultural genocide (TRC, 2015a). While there are an estimated 80,000 former students living today, the ongoing impact of residential schools has been felt and continues to be felt throughout generations (TRC, 2015). The impact of language loss among Indigenous students attending these schools is one of the major causes for the urgency to preserve, revitalize, recognize and protect Indigenous languages (TRC, 2015). The TRC (2015a) has called for the government of Canada to provide equitable resources and support to First Nations schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching by including the Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, values and experiences in the classroom, all of which have been systematically excluded from educational institutes (Ball, 2007; Battiste, 2005; Deer, 2013; TRC, 2015).

Saving Indigenous languages is critical for ensuring the protection of the cultural identity and dignity of Indigenous people, and to safeguarding their traditional knowledge (Battiste, 2013; UN, 2008). It is a matter of great urgency, given that language maintenance has been linked to social, spiritual and emotional health for individuals and communities (Battiste, 2002; Deer, 2013; Guèvremont & Kohen, 2012; RCAP, 1996). Currently, many Indigenous people in

Canada are making efforts to ensure the ongoing preservation, revitalization, recognition and protection of Indigenous languages (AFN, 2007; Deer, 2013). Unfortunately, despite the diversity of Indigenous languages worldwide and efforts being made to save them, they continue to decline in use or are endangered (AFN, 2007; Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Hagege, 2009; Guèvremont & Kohen, 2012; Little Bear, 2009). While researchers have pointed to significant educational implications for Indigenous peoples that are linked with effective revitalization work (Ball, 2007; Battiste, 2002; Little Bear, 2009), less is understood of Indigenous teachers' perceptions of Indigenous language policies and practices that are in the schools where they are doing the work of revitalization. This is the focus of this study.

The interpretation of Indigenous knowledge depends on researchers' attitudes, capabilities, and experiences, and on their understanding of Indigenous consciousness, language and order (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000). As a Naskapi and member of the community, I have insight others do not have. I am an insider researcher where I have my own insider knowledge of the central phenomenon and have easy access to people and information that can further enhance that knowledge (Creswell, 2015). My insider status includes the fact that I taught at the school where the participants of this study currently teach or have taught. While I moved away from the community six years ago, I still have relationships with some of the participants as I have returned to do professional development in the community. As a Naskapi, I am aware that we have different vantage points of perspective but we share the collective experience (Hogan & Topkok, 2015).

Context for the Study

The Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach is located in the subarctic, 16 km northeast of Schefferville on the Québec-Labrador border and has a population of around 1,000 registered

Naskapi members (NNK, 2013). It should be noted that the community of Kawawachikamach is considered a remote community that can only be accessed by train or airplane. The signing of Northeastern Quebec Agreement (NEQA) which followed the JBNQA, led to construction of Kawawachikamach (NEQA, 1978). The vast majority of the residents of Kawawachikamach are Naskapi. Naskapi is the principal language and is spoken by all Naskapi but less frequently written. English is the second language used by many, with some Naskapi people also speaking French and Innu, which is an Indigenous language spoken by a nearby community. The Naskapi still preserve many aspects of their traditional way of life, values and culture and these are clearly visible within the community. Many Naskapis place strong emphasis on extended family ties, spending time camping and going out on the land in all seasons, the oral traditions are valued and elders play a vital role in community life.

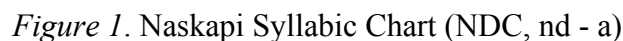
The Naskapi community school of Kawawachikamach, named Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (JSMS), is under the jurisdiction by the Central Quebec School Board (CQSB), located approximately 1000 km southwest of Kawawachikamach. The management of this school by a Quebec school board is a provision of the NEQA. JSMS has about 250 students from pre-kindergarten up to Secondary 5. At JSMS, a Naskapi medium of instruction program became a reality in 1997 with the initiation of the Naskapi Curriculum Development Project (Aitken & McKenzie, 2010). Since 1997, the school-based team has implemented a Naskapi medium of instruction program for the first four years of schooling and has developed programs for upper elementary and secondary. The underlying purpose of this approach was not only to maintain a solid foundation in the first language (L1), but also to use this foundation as a springboard in the acquisition of another language. Through the Naskapi Curriculum project, Naskapi children have an opportunity to learn to read and write in their primary language before they begin learning the

language of wider communication (Jancewicz, 2013). Notably, the Naskapi elders, who learned to read in the context of family, church and traditional life, remain some of the most fluent and successful readers in the mother tongue literacy domains that support it (Jancewicz, 2013). The majority of teachers in the early primary grades are Naskapi and speak fluently in their Indigenous language. Some of the teachers received formal instruction in Naskapi language pedagogy, with a cohort of Naskapi teachers following courses for their Bachelor of Education degree. This has led towards careers teaching in the Naskapi language medium in their local school (Jancewicz, 2013).

A Word About the Naskapi Language

Naskapi language began as an oral tradition and has a standardized syllabic orthography system that is used to preserve the language (Jancewicz, 2013). The Naskapi language consists of 52 syllabics, each with its own sound. (See Figure 1) For example, the word caribou is written as . Using the Roman alphabet, caribou would be spelled and written as *at-tih-k-w*. Students at JSMS are introduced to this orthography system in the early years and any resources or materials produced for teaching the Naskapi language use these syllabics. Naskapi language is a complex yet unique language. Jancewicz (2013) writes,

Naskapi is like other Algonquian languages, characterized by complex words that contain a large number of morphemes (polysynthetic) and flexible word order generally based on pragmatic or semantic principles (non-configurational syntax). Naskapi words can be divided into three lexical categories: verbs, nouns and particles. (p. 25)



For example, the word red in English is reference to a colour. However, in Naskapi red is described as “the colour of blood”. Furthermore, it should be noted that one word that may be very long and can express a detailed and complex set of ideas (Jancewicz, 2013), for example, “iiyuupaakwaasikiniihchaaw [she/he makes bannock]” (NDC, 2012, p. 154). Therefore, the loss of the Naskapi language would not just be about losing the ability to translate into a different language, but the loss of a unique way of thinking about the world.

Complex Intersection between Language, Culture and Identity

Battitse (2013) writes “language provides a sense of belonging, a sense of continuity among a collective, and a deep connection to a knowledge system that grounds the individual to a place, a history, and an ancestral heritage to the people who continue to use and grow in and

through that language” (p. xii). With the release of the final report by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), Canada now has a national, extensively researched document—drawing on Indigenous voices from all over country; it clearly exposes colonization’s brutal impacts that seriously threaten the preservation of Indigenous languages in this country. Fully aware of the threat and its impact, the majority of Indigenous peoples in Canada are adamant that languages must be protected, preserved, promoted and practiced. Using them in daily lives will counter the undermining of colonization (Kawharu, 2014; Kirkness, 1998). Languages are the basic media for the transmission and survival of Indigenous consciousness, cultures, literatures, histories, and values (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000). Unfortunately, languages are dying in Canada’s Indigenous communities at an alarming rate. The decline of Indigenous languages in Canada has reached a critical point for Indigenous peoples (Canadian Heritage, 2003).

Of over 60 Indigenous languages in Canada, few are expected to survive (AFN, 2007, Canadian Heritage, 2003; StatCan, 2011). Statistics in 1996 showed that only three (Cree, Ojibwa and Inuktitut) out of Canada’s roughly 80 Indigenous languages had enough speakers to be considered secure (AFN, 2007, Canadian Heritage, 2003). Between 1951 and 1981 the percentage of Aboriginal people reporting an Aboriginal language as a mother tongue declined from 87.4% to 29.3% (AFN, 2007); every time a language dies so does an expression of human experience like no other (McIvor, 2009, UNESCO, 2001). The Indigenous languages that have survived a destructive colonization process are increasingly threatened by the rising power and prevalence of the dominant languages of English and French (Usborne, et. al, 2011). The death of languages spoken by small numbers of people is inevitable without community-based efforts to preserve those languages (Crystal, 2000). With a longstanding hegemonic framework

surrounding language learning, language priority has been pushed by local communities who recognize the need to bring the language into the school setting. To that end, Wright & Taylor (2003) state, “any school policy must be made in the context of this possibility” (p. 4).

Bilingual and multilingual learners. In many countries, children learn many languages both within their own families and in schools, making the norm of multilingualism. Research states that students must continue experiences, growth and dialogue in their primary language, in order to continue developing cognitive and academic growth in second language (Battiste, 2013; Cummins, 2005; Lewis-Moreno, 2007). For this reason, research insists schools use a bilingual instructional approach over monolingual instruction in order to meet the needs of the English language learners (ELL) (Battiste, 2013; Cummins et. al, 2005; Cummins, 2009; Petit, 2011; Lewis-Moreno, 2007; Serna, 2009). Many studies clearly demonstrate how students who enter the school system with a strong foundational knowledge of their primary language, can be effectively taught, guided and supported to acquire literacy skills in the target language while continuing to value their primary language in the instructional process (Cummins et. al, 2005; Cummins, 2009). Encouraging learners to write and speak in their primary language allows them to develop an understanding of language development (Cummins et. al, 2005; Cummins, 2009; Serna, 2009). Cantoni (1997) states “instruction that promotes proficiency in one’s first language (L1) also promotes proficiency in the second language (L2) provided that there is an adequate amount of exposure to L2 and motivation to learn it (p. 3). Furthermore, students that develop learning strategies in L1 will then transfer them to the L2 (Cantoni, 1997; Cummins, 2005; Serna, 2009). This cross-language transfer will support their bi-literacy development (Cummins, 2005). The research clearly advocates the need to respond appropriately to the multilingual and multicultural contexts within classrooms and schools. By doing this, students feel included and

empowered, and it provides opportunity to use their entire linguistic repertoire (Battiste, 2005; Cummins; 2005; Montero et. al., 2013). However there is still a gap in the literature on how schools can support Indigenous students transitioning from an Indigenous language to English.

Strengths in Indigenous Language Programs

The continued felt legacies of oppressive residential schools has led Indigenous groups that are in danger of language and culture loss to view schooling as a major means of regeneration (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Battiste, 2013; Kawharu, 2014). Indigenous groups have implemented different Indigenous language programs in schools, ranging from complete immersion to learning their Indigenous language as a second language (Usborne et. al, 2011; Kawharu, 2014). Immersion programs can simultaneously revitalize a threatened language and prepare students for success in mainstream society (Usborne et. al, 2011). Recent research into bilingualism programs shows that Indigenous language immersion can significantly enhance the intellectual capacities of Indigenous children (CLC, 2009). Furthermore, culturally relevant classroom experiences and learning have a far more enduring and effective impact on student success (Battiste, 2005; Cherubini, 2014; Montero et. al, 2013). These programs have the mandate of maintaining Indigenous heritage, language and culture, while preparing children to participate in mainstream society (Wright & Taylor, 2001; Visser & Fovet, 2014).

Two Indigenous organizations in Quebec that have bilingual programs in their schools are the Cree School Board (CSB) in Quebec and Kativik School Board (KSB) in Nunavik. At KSB schools, the language of instruction from Kindergarten to grade 2 is Inuktitut. In Grade 3, parents are given the choice of having their children placed in English or French immersion (KSB, n.d.). The KSB suggests that the impact of Inuit language-fluency on identity and self-esteem directly translates to an increase in academic achievement (CLC, 2009). Full Cree instruction at CSB is

from pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten, after which then students transition to English following this. Students continue Cree mother tongue classes from grade 1 to Secondary 5 (CSB, 2011). The goal of the project is to: use Cree language in schools in order to validate Cree culture, create Cree tribal identity, create a curriculum reflecting Cree culture and the Cree conceptual framework, and implement this curriculum in the public schools (Stiles, 1997). As for the Hawaiian and the Maori people, their language immersion programs run with no English classes until Grade 4 (Hermes, 2007; Kawharu, 2014). In addition, the Maori have programs that consist of language nests where children from birth to eight years of age are exposed to the Maori language in a homelike atmosphere (Stiles, 1997).

Having the Indigenous language as the medium of instruction in these early years is crucial as it promotes: language fluency, language development, identity in the classroom, self-esteem, and most importantly, ensures that students continue to maintain Indigenous heritage, language and culture, while preparing children to participate in mainstream society (Cantoni, 1997; Cummins et. al, 2005; Cummins, 2009; Serna, 2009; Wright & Taylor, 2001; Visser & Fovet, 2014). The Indigenous language and knowledge that was once invisible by strategic and systematic denial through colonial government control of schools and the legacy of the residential schools, can now become largely visible to Indigenous youth (Battiste, 2013). The success of these language programs, according to Battiste (2013) relies on “strong grassroots activity and community members being actively involved in planning, organizing, and implementing of these programs” (p. 151).

The Disconnect between Indigenous Language Policy and Practice

The use of an Indigenous language has been recognized as a basic right, however, the reality for many Indigenous peoples is that the realization of this right has been seriously

undermined through colonization, by policies that display hegemonic power and in colonial discourse denigrating Indigenous identity (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2009; Kawharu, 2014). Usually, these imposed policies and practices are created through monolingual ideologies (Cummins, 2009; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995) favouring English language instruction (Battiste, 2013). Battiste (2013) writes “the elite in power chooses what language will be used for this state network of education, and what content and methods will be sanctioned” (p. 104). Monolingual ideology is one of the most influential factors in preventing the adoption of policies leading towards multilingualism, acceptance of linguistic diversity and linguistic human rights (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). These policies and practices are usually implemented by resource people who are poorly informed about Indigenous languages, their uniqueness and fragility (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995), leading to Indigenous groups to be presented with a great challenge “greater than language loss but socialization of language and knowledge, ways of knowing and nonverbal and verbal communication” (Battiste, 2013, p. 151).

In the province of Quebec, the first large scale policy-based efforts to act according to UNESCO’s 1953 affirmation for Indigenous languages medium instruction began in the 1970s with the Project for the Amerindianization of Schools. This was an initiative of the Quebec office of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Burnaby, MacKenzie, & Salt, 1999). It followed the publication of National Indian Brotherhood’s key 1972 text, *Indian Control of Indian Education* (Burnaby, 1996). This point is also central to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008), which states “Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, develop and transmit to future generations their languages, oral traditions, histories, philosophies, writing systems and literatures” (p. 6). Communities in Canada and abroad are using creativity, ingenuity, innovation and fierce determination to preserve and

revive their Indigenous languages (McIvor, 2009). Many communities and linguistic groups are becoming vocal about the need to ensure that the youngest members of their communities keep their language and linguistic heritage; it is a system that holds a depth of knowledge that connects to place, for it is place where identity resides (Battiste, 2013; UNESCO, 2001).

In the context of the community of Kawawachikamach, there are language policies in place. However these policies can be argued to display Eurocentric views on education because they tend to favour the dominant language (Fyn, 2015), or do not allow for an opportunity to discuss the place of the Indigenous language. This leads to question of how these policies are experienced by the people whose first language is not of the dominant language.

The North Eastern Quebec Agreement (NEQA), signed in 1978, has policy implications for the Naskapi school. It represents more than the settlement of land claims; in fact it discusses issues in many areas, particularly in education. Although there are no specifics related to language acquisition, the NEQA provides for the Naskapi people to make decisions that serve the needs and priorities of the Naskapi people (NEQA, 1978). In this agreement, in the chapter on education, it advises that an education committee be in place: the Naskapi Education Committee (NEC). The NEC acts as an advisory function similar to those assigned to school committees under Quebec's Education Act (NEQA, 1978). One of the responsibilities of the NEC is to develop the content of courses designed to preserve the Naskapi language and culture (NEQA, 1978). Whether this duty is being performed or even known by the committee members is undetermined. However, there are no other provisions within the agreement that support Naskapi language acquisition and culture.

Another document with policy implications, which is compulsory for all school boards under the Ministère de l'Éducation, et de L'Enseignement Supérieure (MEES) of Quebec, is the

Management and Educational Success Agreement (MESA) (CQSB, 2013). The MESA, revised annually, defines the school or centre's role in supporting the school board objectives and targets for student success, within the school board strategic plan and in line with MEES goals (CQSB, 2013). JSMS has an obligation to participate in this because it is, according to their 2011 MESA, "a public Anglophone elementary and high school, under the jurisdiction of the Central Quebec School Board" (CQSB, 2013). Part of the agreement between MEES and school boards through the MESA is that the school must review its school success plan and ensure that it is aligned with the school board's strategic plan (MEES, 2017). Although there are literacy objectives set in CQSB strategic plan, the focus is on the improvement of "the mastery of English Language Arts and the quality of French" (CQSB, 2013, np), with no mention of the Naskapi language nor the distinct nature of the Naskapi community. Given these guideline for alignment, it is not surprising that Naskapi language literacy is not mentioned in JSMS MESA (JSMS, 2013) – despite its prominent place in the early years, and its impact on literacy learning in the other languages (Cummins, 2005). This example illustrates how a policy, like the MESA, displays hegemonic power through its focuses on success and achievement in the two languages of a "bilingual Canada." It also promotes a hegemonic agenda that favours strengthening the dominant language and national identity in the country and province, rather than the languages and identities of others (Haque & Patrick, 2015; Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995).

There are many current frameworks that emphasize the need for Indigenous communities to teach the Indigenous language in the schools such as the TRC (2015b), UNESCO (2001), and United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008). However, it can be questioned as to whether these policies are being used when decisions are being made related to language acquisition for the Naskapi students and language program at JSMS. Battiste (2013)

stresses that “if there is no recognition of and appreciation for Indigenous languages in state policies and practices, these languages will vanish from neglect, hegemony of power relations over languages, and official support for other languages” (p. 146).

School Culture: Impact of Teachers’ Misconceptions of Language Acquisition

It has been understood that many teachers are not adequately prepared to teach ELL because of their lack of understanding of how students in these situations learn (Cummins, 2005; Gabbilon, 2012; Pettit, 2011), and this can be problematic to the culture of the school. Muhammad (2011) defines school culture as “set of norms, values and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of school” which can be either a positive or toxic school culture (p. 12). The human factors of a school affect the day-to-day practices and behaviours within a school (Muhammad, 2011). Unfortunately, many mainstream teachers hold deficit views and beliefs toward the ELL in their classrooms (August, Shanahan & Escamilla, 2009; Cummins, 2005; Gabbilon, 2012; Petit, 2011), thus leading to a toxic school culture, where staff come to believe in the inability of the students to succeed and a generally negative attitude prevails (Muhammad, 2011). Related to language teaching, Cummins (2009) states that the five common false assumptions that teachers make for learning a target language are: 1) English is best taught monolingually, 2) the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker, 3) the earlier English is taught, the better the results, 4) the more English is taught, the better the results, 5) standards of English will decline if other languages are used for any significant amount of instructional time. All of these misconceptions have one thing in common: they all derive from a monolingual ideology (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995). Many misconceptions about second language acquisition continue to be prevalent and have major influence on teacher perceptions about intelligence and abilities of ELL students (Smith, 2010),

leading to school-wide decisions and practices in place based on these perceptions and misconceptions. School culture of low expectations for students inadequate general and multicultural learning materials, assignment of the least-experienced teachers to classes in which students need the most help, insensitivity toward cultural differences, and a curriculum that does not reflect diverse student perspectives are examples of monolingual policies and practices that can be seen in schools (Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Without appropriate and timely training for instruction of ELLs, teachers will feel classroom time must be divided between ELL and non-ELL students (Smith, 2010). All the above mentioned illustrate the gaps between policy and practice in this particular context, making it critical to create opportunities to discuss the place of the Indigenous language within the classroom, school and community.

Implications from the Literature for the Context

Teacher beliefs and attitudes – in this case about Indigenous language, about multilingual and bilingual learners, about language acquisition and development– which are formed by the values they hold - play an important role in student performance and academic success (Petit, 2011). In Kawawachikamach, teachers being hired by CQSB to teach in the community school, who are mostly non-Indigenous, usually have little knowledge or understanding of the Naskapi language and culture and its complexities. Moreover, some teachers tend to have deficit views on the students' language acquisition of the target languages at this school (Aitken & McKenzie, 2010; Cummins, 2005; Gabbilon, 2012; Petit, 2011). For example, it has been found that teachers describe the students as “behind”, “not equipped”, “disadvantaged by their language”, or “know nothing” when they arrive in Grade 3; teachers have claimed “real teaching starts when the English instructions begin”; that teachers have to “start from scratch”; “students are not at

level”, and “they will continue to fall behind if we don’t introduce English earlier” (Aitken & Mckenzie, 2010; Robinson, 2015).

These deficit views and attitudes of language acquisition often lead to “manufactured consent”, where decisions made are usually around increasing L2, following a monolingual ideology mindframe, without a real discussion or dialogue (Fyn, 2015). Through several years of experience teaching in my own community in the transitional year¹, I remarked that there was rarely a discussion about the value of developing Naskapi (L1) literacy skills, instead there was a greater focus on how to allow for students to be successful in L2. School authorities are deeply implicated in the situation, whereby using education to create a language shift: a process of transferring one language's dominance – usually from L1 to the L2 (Fyn, 2015).

The learning experiences ELL will have in school is partly dependent on the beliefs and attitudes of the teachers they will encounter (Petit, 2011). For ELL to become academically successful, teachers must hold positive beliefs and high expectations for them (Muhammad, 2009; Petit, 2011). If teachers have unexamined negative beliefs toward ELL, however well-meaning the teachers, they might discriminate without realizing it (Cummins, 2005; Petit, 2011). On the other hand, teachers who hold high expectations for ELL are able to make a positive impact on the school experiences of these students (Petit, 2011); therefore high expectations are crucial. However, to understand teaching from teachers’ perspectives, we have to understand the beliefs with which they define their work (Pettit, 2011). When teacher beliefs are not in agreement with the experiences and beliefs of their learners, this gap causes discrepancies between teachers’ teaching and students’ ways of learning, which inevitably influences student

¹ Teachers that are assigned to the transitional year (grade three) are uniquely responsible for decision-

learning negatively (Gabillon, 2012). Hence arises another reason for an inquiry of Naskapi teachers' perception of learning the Indigenous language.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

With the decline of Indigenous language speakers, there is an urgent need for revitalization (Guèvremont & Kohen, 2012; Little Bear, 2009). The literature supports Indigenous language use in schools. There are Indigenous language programs described in literature, however there is a gap in understanding Indigenous teachers' perception of Indigenous language policy and practice that are in place in schools. The purpose of this study is to investigate Naskapi teachers'² beliefs on Indigenous language policy and practice at Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (JSMS), where Indigenous language is spoken and used for teaching and learning in the early grades. The findings of the study may contribute to strengthening Indigenous language and policy and practice in schools, and informing and expanding discussion among current and future teachers seeking to teach at this, or similar, community schools.

This study focuses on the views of Naskapi teachers regarding Indigenous language policy and practice at Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (JSMS), where Indigenous language is spoken and used for teaching and learning from pre-kindergarten to grade two. Teachers who are mother-tongue speakers of Naskapi have experience and insight into using the language in a school setting, or teaching in Naskapi or teaching with the language.

The guiding research questions of the study are:

- What are Naskapi teachers' views on Naskapi language policy in the school?
- What are Naskapi teachers' views on language acquisition practice in the school?

² Naskapi teachers are members of the community that teach or have taught in the Naskapi language or are Naskapi teachers teaching or have taught other core subjects in English.

- What are Naskapi teachers' views of what the presence of Naskapi language and culture could look like in school?

Methodology

The research design consists of two phases; in the first phase the participants are part of a focus group discussion. In the second phase, participants are invited to have an additional discussion about the themes individually to help with interpreting the significance of the themes, especially around policy and practice in the school.

The next section provides information about the participants, how they became involved, and describes the method used to gather the data for this research project.

Profile of the Participants

There are approximately fifteen Naskapi teachers who teach or have taught Naskapi at the primary level at the community school. Purposeful selection was used because these individuals understand the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). In total, six participants participated in the focus groups. The participants are Naskapi speaking teachers that have taught or currently teach in Naskapi or in English in the primary grades at this school. Since there is only one Naskapi Nation, there are a limited number of Naskapi teachers. Therefore, in order to protect the identity of the participants specific details will not be provided. Exposing details poses a privacy risk - as they may be indirectly identified because of description. To limit risk, no identifying quotes or individual situations or specific examples are used; the emphasis is on themes and their discussion. There are twelve people who meet this study's criteria. They range in age from late 20s to late 60s and have taught in the past two decades. Interested participants were invited to form groups of three to four, seeking the most participation possible. Two groups

were formed and each focus group lasted over 90 minutes. All of the details mentioned in the formal letter of invitation, which was written in English, were addressed at the focus group.

Research Design

Western scientific research is explicitly linked to colonialism (Wilson, 2001). Colonization was an attempt to isolate Indigenous peoples from their cultures and ways of knowing (TRC, 2015). With this awareness, change in research processes is critical (Wilson, 2001). This qualitative project used Indigenous research methodologies and an Indigenous lens in order to gain insight of the teachers. By decolonizing methodologies, researchers begin to address the damage created through colonization and as a research paradigm, adding a new way of critically thinking about research (Wilson, 2001). This project challenges traditional research practices, acknowledging the impact of colonial history in Canada, and ensures that this research is desired and benefits the community of Kawawachikamach (Battiste & Youngblood, 2000; Ermine, Sinclair, & Jeffery, 2004; Porsanger, 2010). Indigenous research methodologies are seen as wholeness that extends to epistemology, axiology, ontology and methodology that interconnects, interrelates and intertwines (Hogan & Topkok, 2015). Porsanger (2010) argues that “Indigenous peoples’ interests, knowledge and experiences must be at the center of methodologies in the construction of knowledge about Indigenous people” (p. 434); that has been a main focus in designing this study.

As is it significant to Indigenous methodologies, I used the conversational methods (Kovack, 2010). This could be considered similar to focus group interviews, as well as talking circles. A Naskapi language conversational approach aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge. There is much to be gained by seeking the soul of peoples in their languages (Battiste, 2000; Kovach, 2010). Being a Naskapi researcher, it

was critical that I used this approach as it honours Naskapi knowledge and considers the relationship that evolves between sharing stories and listening; this becomes a strong relationship (Wilson, 2001). Hogan & Topkok (2015) remind us that:

Research by and for Indigenous people is a ceremony that brings relationships together, a relationship to other living things, the land, objects and places. Everything is connected and everything is a whole, and as such, is as sacred as a ceremony. (p. 61)

However while adopting this stance of the connected whole we must also keep in mind that the experiences of the individuals and collectives are “inevitably framed and constrained by historical and ongoing relations of systemic inequality towards Indigenous peoples” (May & Aikman, 2003, p. 144). Following along the words of Battiste (2013) “to speak is to create and to repeat is to re-create” (p. 74). Using a conversational approach allows for Indigenous research to be a means of “empowerment of Indigenous peoples through production of knowledge and capacity building” (Porsanger, 2010, p. 433).

In order to address the central phenomenon and to effectively analyze the interview responses, open-ended prompt questions were used during both group discussions. This helped elicit views of policy and practice of Naskapi language in a learning environment. Examples of questions are: *What are your thoughts about the state of Naskapi language? What stands out about your experiences of teaching in Naskapi/or as a Naskapi teacher in the school?* The sessions were audio recorded as the aim of the research is to explore and understand the participants’ comments in context.

The discussion sessions were held in areas that allowed participants to have a deep connection to the spiritual, emotional, physical and intellectual aspects of the land and place (Ng-A-Fook, 2013; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). This helps us to encourage the voices of marginalized

people (Getty, 2010). The two sessions were held at the community *saaputuwaan* [walled tent] used for community gatherings and teachings, and at a home of one of the participants.

Participants each brought food to share with the group, which is a common practice for Naskapis when people come together.³

In order to continue valuing the Indigenous language, I encouraged participants to speak in Naskapi or English, depending on their comfort. I read the consent form in English and also took time to explain in Naskapi (Appendix I). I had the six prompt questions typed out on paper and placed in the center of our talking circle to give opportunity for participants to reflect on their responses. There was a mix of both languages used during the focus group. Allowing the participants to speak in the Naskapi language provides “a sense of belonging, a sense of continuity among a collective, and a deep connection to a knowledge system that grounds the individual to a place, a history, an ancestral heritage and to the people who continue to use and grow in and through that language” (Battiste, 2013, p. xii). During the conversations, I asked a series of elaborating probes, in Naskapi and English, in order to elicit more information on the central phenomenon such as, *tell me more, could you explain your response more, what do you mean by that?* (Creswell, 2015).

Setting the stage for participants to speak freely was a priority for me, hence why picking any place outside of school grounds and walls was key. I wanted to provide a safe place to speak of a topic of great importance and value, and make sure participants felt at ease talking about the language. I would start each discussion holding an eagle feather that belonged to my late uncle who was known for his advocacy for language and culture teachings to the youth. I reminded the

³ There was an attempt by participants to have the focus group in a cabin by a lake (15 km outside of the community), however this was not possible due to weather conditions at the time of year.

participants that the eagle feather represents the openness to share. I encouraged participants to stroke the feather, which is known to relax speakers as they tell their story. I explained in Naskapi the purpose of the study and how their words will strengthen understanding of the use of Naskapi language in school.

At the end of the discussions, participants talked about what would happen next. One person asked me what I would do for change at the school level, giving me the task to be an advocate. This made me realize that they saw me as more than just a researcher, but as a catalyst for change at the community school. This planning for action is yet to come but I plan on sharing the power and control, leading to a new project as “participant driven research” (Bishop, 2003). It is a start to the idea of Indigenous capacity building “on our terms and for our own purposes” (Porsanger, 2010, p. 435).

Interpretive Approach and Analysis

The first step of the data analysis was translating while transcribing each interview conducted; over 40 pages of transcripts were compiled. The discussion sessions were aimed to last for 90 minutes, however we did go over this time. Questions and concerns addressed before and after the sessions were answered in Naskapi by myself. The conversational prompts were provided in English and Naskapi. Most often participants spoke in Naskapi. I had to be extremely careful on how the words used to describe a particular situation were translated into the proper word in English. Indigenous people perceive that “all of creation is interrelated in a circle of life, with no beginning or end...the interaction between all forms of life is called the law of circular interactions” (Getty, 2010, p. 9). For example, the word respect was used many times and in different ways. When Naskapis refer to respect of language there can be an emotional, spiritual, intellectual and physical connection to it. It is simply not “respect the language”, there

is a deeper meaning to the word. Therefore, when translating and transcribing, I had to be vigilant of the words I used to describe the connection to the word “respect”, causing this process to be longer than anticipated. Furthermore, a lot of the ideas shared in the focus were told through a story-telling approach, which is common for Indigenous people (Michell, 2015). Oral stories are “used to guide how we think, how we relate to one another, and how to take care of one’s self, others, and the natural world (Michell, 2015). I had to be cautious on how I interpreted the values or messages stemming from these oral stories. Following this, I did a preliminary exploratory analysis where I explored the data to obtain a general sense of the interview as a whole before breaking it into parts (Creswell, 2015). I looked at themes that focused around the questions asked.

Through the second round of data analysis, I used a coding process where I looked at the transcriptions and sought to code participants' comments into provisional themes using inductive data analysis, as it can enhance a fuller understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015). I looked for emergent themes and major themes. Coding the comments into themes allowed for major ideas to emerge out of the data analysis, which helped with understanding the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2015).

Following this, I reached out to the same participants to comment on the themes and help me in interpreting what is being said, especially around policy and practice in the school. On a voluntary basis, I spoke to two people on the telephone. Through this collaborative procedure, I allow for community members to participate in the planning, execution, and evaluation of the research results and using the model for power sharing (Battiste, 2000; Bishop, 2003). Questions asked from the themes were: 1) Can you share some examples of how elder presences in the school would look? 2) What does it mean to the school for Naskapi teachings and skills being

brought into the school? 3) What would you hope for from the Naskapi curriculum office? A second attempt was made to reach out to others who participated in the focus group but no response was made.⁴ Through these discussions, there was pro-action from producing new knowledge based on our cultures, experiences. As a researcher, I can theorize on the basis of these concepts (Porsanger, 2010). The main focus of this second phase is for Indigenous capacity building by expressing “on our terms and for our own purposes” (Porsanger, 2010, p. 435).

Ethical Issues

There are several ethical issues that were considered in this research project. Since Western scientific “research” is explicitly linked to colonialism (Wilson, 2001), I was open and transparent about gathering data by clearly explaining the purpose of the study and the general impact that it will likely have (Creswell, 2015). I helped participants understand that I value their responses and wanted to hear their opinions, following the insights from Indigenous researchers. I explained that this project is to come to a shared understanding of Indigenous language policy and practice. I made it clear that it was entirely up to the participants to be involved or not.

Participants were reminded of the importance of sharing and being honest to the discussions and understood they would not directly be quoted. However, being such a small community, other members of the community heard of the study and the discussions held. A few weeks after the discussion group, it was brought to my attention, through a source that wished to remain anonymous, that the participants were called to the office one by one. Participants felt anxious and concerned, and questioned the confidentiality of the process. Maintaining confidentiality in a small community is difficult, I anticipated that there might be issues such as

⁴ It should be noted that a tragic accident occurred within the community that caused the death of a student attending JSMS. Since Kawawachikamach is a small community, when a death occurs within the community, it is deeply felt by everyone. Therefore, I was not surprised that I did not have most of the participants in the second phase due to the reason mentioned above.

this. There is a sense of fear in sharing past negative experiences or speaking negatively about the current school system, policies or practices. The participants expressed concern that there would be consequences for challenging current practices and policies in place. The reason given for their call to the office was to ensure that they felt comfortable about the research. However, this can be argued to display hegemonic power. I contacted the administration. I felt I needed to step in because I knew what tension and worry this was causing the participants. In order to ease the participants, I shared specific questions that were asked during the focus group and to contact me or my supervisor directly if there was anything that needed to be clarified for the rest of the study. A voice that has been silenced has now been asked to share; this could lead people to feel uneasy. Teachers experienced feeling silenced, and were working overcoming their silence.

Challenges for a Naskapi researcher. Throughout this project, I needed to be self-aware; in order to facilitate reflexivity, I answered the open-ended research questions before the discussions. This allowed me to examine my personal assumptions and clarify my beliefs before interpreting the responses (Ortlipp, 2004). Being a Naskapi researcher, this process was difficult as I felt that I was battling two views on research: westernized research analysis and Indigenous research analysis. For example, Western research limits evidence and explanations to the physical world; Indigenous research takes physical and metaphysical dimensions into account (Hogan & Topkok, 2015). I found this process difficult, and at times frustrating, as I was thinking and analyzing in the westernized mind frame, but then had to force myself to move towards an Indigenous perspective. A good example of this is how I viewed learning. I battled through the westernized way of learning that only focuses on the intellectual part. As for the Indigenous way of learning, the focus is on four aspects: the intellectual, emotional, mental and physical well-being. I had to acknowledge what Wallin and Peden (2014) describe: “[N]o matter

how hard you try, you cannot divorce your research and writing from your past experiences, who you are, what you believe and what you value” (p. 40). Many times I thought I had it, that I understood the themes that were emerging, but remembered that I had to re-analyze from more of an Indigenous perspective. I had to deconstruct my own assumptions, values and recognize my knowledge of White privilege gained by having gone through the westernized education system myself (Wallin & Peden, 2014). I challenged myself to go beyond the basics of content analysis as outlined above. I read my transcriptions over 10 times, although certain portions were read more. There were moments when these two worlds clashed in my thinking, perceptions and assumptions but I worked through these emotions by always staying grounded in my Indigenous identity.

Findings

The analysis of over 40 pages of transcripts led me to identify five themes: two-worlds collide, elder presence, the land as a classroom, value of language, and curriculum and language development in relation to material and space. The first theme of “two-worlds” is an overarching theme that describes the idea that under one roof within the school, there are two worlds. The four other themes provide the specific examples of the impact of the two-world divide in the school.

Two Worlds

In order to understand how the first theme runs through and over the others, one must imagine walking into a space where “two worlds” are experienced by the participants. The two worlds are felt by as competing perceptions and beliefs that continuously clash in day to day activities and decisions in the school. There are also the “two worlds” of what is currently happening in the school and what participants yearn for, or wish could start happening.

Additionally, there are the “two worlds” of their past and the present experiences of life in the school.

Participants described these two-world divide as “us”- referring to Naskapi teachers and “them”- referring to non-Naskapi teachers. Participants viewed the Naskapi and English instruction classes as two worlds where there was no shared responsibility for student success. In contrast, the participants commented on the importance of having a strong relationship not only with the students but with the community as a whole. Based on their experiences as students or teachers at JSMS, participants had a lot to share on the disengagement of the non-Naskapi teachers. Explicit examples are not provided for reasons of confidentiality.

Half of the participants commented on how the older teachers “back then” were involved and motivated to want to learn about the community. One participant shared “The old teachers ⁵ that used to teach here would come to the community during the weekends. They would visit elders. That’s how they got to know the elders. There was a lot of respect and respect for others.”. According to participants, this is no longer visible in the school. One participant’s commented “Today’s teachers, they only leave their house, go to school, they stay there, then go back to their houses. This is what they do.”. It should be mentioned that housing is not available for non-Naskapi teachers in Kawawachikamach, so they live in the neighbouring town of Schefferville, which is about 15 km away from the reserve. Non-Naskapi teachers share one bus to get to and from the community.

The participants explain that the two groups do not engage in dialogue. They see this as contributing to the lack of collaboration, the appearance of disinterest that non-Naskapi teachers

⁵ Old teachers are non-Naskapi teachers that taught in the 1990s.

have in what is happening in the other parts of the school and community, and the limited learning about the Naskapi language, culture and values.

Elder Presence

The teachers spoke about the challenges of working with a recently standardized language. Elders have been recording their ideas in writing in different ways over their lives. However, the lexicon was published just over 20 years ago. Not everyone in the community agrees on the standardized spelling. One teacher commented, "We were told by an elder that there are mistakes in the lexicon itself." Another said "We need to update our material". Another questioned, "How can we teach the language correctly when there are obvious mistakes on the guides we use?"

There are challenges for teaching when people in the community continue to use different spellings, as this participant explains, "Then we get stuck because we don't know which one is correct." They describe possible solutions, "I guess we have to ask people to come in." This might be a solution, but it is possible to note the tension about regulations and procedures, which some participants shared. Participants mentioned of the resources in place in the curriculum office they must refer to in teaching of the Naskapi language: the Naskapi lexicon, vocabulary list prepared by elder and a grammatical book. One said, "There are also guidelines that need to be followed. Like a guideline for grammar." Another commented, "We always used the lexicon first." Significantly, much of the language in the lexicon describes the surroundings in great detail and provides details of the language needed for carrying out traditional cultural practices. It is the language needed to describe day to day life, particular in school, that is absent. Elders are seen as the people that know most of the Naskapi language. One said "I would like for elders to make things better in the schools because they know more of speaking Naskapi." This is

identified as a problem for the Naskapi teachers - and the community in general, "How do we continue to make a language strong when we do not keep up with the ever changing world the Naskapi must live in?"

It was repeatedly mentioned that having stable elder presence in the school as part would be the most effective solution for the language development issue. It should be noted that there have been a few elders that have been hired for the curriculum office, however these elders are only at the school for a few hours per week, which is an unrealistic amount of time for the work that needs to be done. According to the participants not everyone sees, understands or values the role of elders in language development. Participants commented on the past and how there was more elder presence in the school than today. This was described as non-Naskapi teachers in the past, those that taught in the early 1990's were interested in learning through the elders. This was visible through having them visit within the community on a regular basis, the bond non-native teachers had with the students and elders and the motivation to want to learn from the elders. However, one participant described this no longer seen, by stating "that was the bond back then. Today it is not there. There is no culture in school today. There is none. It's sad when you think of it.". When participants do ask for elder presence to administration, they are told there is not enough funding to do this. One said, "inviting an elder to come and help us, to be there with us all the time but this can't happen because of money. It's always about money". Participants did not understand how funding was an issue when they are aware that there is yearly budget of \$500 allocated just for material and resources for each homeroom classroom.

There is immense pressure felt by the participants on teaching the Naskapi language in order for Naskapi children to be fluent speakers, readers and writers. Participants commented that Naskapi elders know more of the language than they do. Two participants defined elders

knowledge of the language based on their upbringing “Elders were taught all they know by elders as children [time spent in Fort Chimo]. They were taken on camping trips, they would set up their own wigwams and prepare the *achikaasuustaaw* (traps or snares) for small games.”

Although more than half of the participants did receive some kind of training on the structure of the Naskapi language, participants felt that elder presence would support, validate and clarify what they know. Participants expressed that there are many situations and challenges they face daily where language related issues arise. For example, one participant stated that there are a lot of Naskapi words expected to be taught related to land based learning and skills. If they had an elder in the school at all times, it would help with dealing with this challenge alone. It is evident that participants see the elders as people who know more of the Naskapi language, culture, traditions, and skills than they do because of their extensive knowledge and experiences on the land gained by growing up around Fort Chimo and Fort McKenzie and must be part of the day to day life of the school.

Unfortunately, some of the Naskapi elders that have experienced life back then have passed on. When elders pass away, they take a life of knowledge with them (Aitken, 2017). Of the group of elders that have experienced life back in Fort Chimo and Fort McKenzie, there are only about 20 elders still alive today. (See Figure 2) This traditional knowledge has been passed on to others but not necessarily documented. Projects have been done in the past but what is out there is not known to all. Several years ago, a project initiated by the Naskapi Nation of



Figure 2. Naskapi men near the Hudson Bay Trading Post at Fort Chimo (NDC, nd - b).

Kawawachikamach entitled *Going Back Home* involved elders returning "to the site of Fort McKenzie, a remote Hudson Bay Company (HBC) post in northern Quebec where they and their families had participated in trade commerce in the first half of the twentieth century" (Aitken, 2017, p. 231).

Students of JSMS, with support of a team, helped in documenting the experiences of the elders. Similar to this project, participants suggested elders could come to the school; guide students directly while teachers observe and document all the interaction for later use. This documentation could then become part of the library teaching resources to be accessible to all. Community members know that the elders in Kawawachikamach all have their own particular expertise, such as extensive knowledge of the rivers and lakes from Fort Chimo to Kawawachikamach, preparation of caribou hide, making moccasins, making Naskapi traditional

snowshoes, or making pemmican. By doing this, participants believed that the school as a whole would begin to see elders as having an important role and place for the learning of students. Furthermore, by involving all staff members in learning of the language and culture with elders, participants believed that non-Naskapi teachers would begin to understand their value in the learning and not seeing teaching of Naskapi as a subject.

The Land as a Classroom

Participants all believed that learning of the Naskapi language cannot just happen in the classroom, it must directly happen on the land. As mentioned before, Naskapi words are complex therefore, to have a full understanding of words one must be involved in demonstration, practice and animation, making this challenging to do inside a four-wall classroom. One participant describes this challenge as “there are some words we can never bring back. There is a long list with *aschiyy iyimuuun* (land based-words), especially in the legends that we no longer use because we are not always on the land.” If a lot of the words come from demonstrating, practicing and animating directly on the land then how can teachers bring this kind of learning into a small and constricted classroom.

An example of how complex teaching a skill can be I will explain the steps for preparing caribou hide that is used to make Naskapi clothing like moccasins. I have some background knowledge of preparing caribou hide from my upbringing. Preparing caribou hide can take at least four to five days with several different steps. Each step requires the use of different vocabulary related to tools, the action and materials needed for this process. Furthermore, the environment needs to be factored in. Describing the steps of smoking the caribou hide in order for it to become dry, you must have special wood pieces to burn that can only found near swamps during fall months. The burning and drying can only happen outside and under specific

weather conditions such as during spring or summer time. What was expressed by participants related to space utters the need for the school to realize that learning cannot just happen in the classroom, through Western education that is only focuses on cognitive and intellectual development of the students. It must involve learning outside the four-wall classroom. This perception on education must be considered when decisions are being made that have direct impact on the language and culture teachings and learning.

There have been several efforts made to challenge current school policies and practices by participants in the attempt to bridge the two-worlds of learning in a classroom. Three participants shared how they brought Naskapi skills teachings in a classroom setting that seem fit such as plucking and gutting ptarmigan and bringing caribou bones to show students. However, participants also expressed that when they tried to bring learning opportunities that require a larger learning space within the school, they encountered resistance. One example was how one participant decided to teach students how to scrape caribou hide with the guidance of elders and other Naskapi teachers.

Scraping caribou hide is at least a three-day job and requires a lot of time. (See Figure 3) Participants described certain resistance in the school such as protocols related to hygiene, non-Naskapi staff refusing to give up their teaching time for students to engage in learning that takes more than one hour, having to always fill in a form when wanting to take students nearby even though it is a community so small that children roam freely, or having a sign up sheet for the rest of the school to take this opportunity to experience or learn of the scrapping of caribou fur, but only a few teachers signed up their class. This is an example of how the westernized way of learning is seen as more important than the Indigenous ways of learning.



Figure 3. Naskapi Elder, Kathleen Tooma, scraping the caribou hide (Shecanapish, nd).

One solution for this would be for the school to provide a learning space outside of the school. Kawawachikamach is within a valley, surrounded rivers and lakes, so one can imagine all the possible locations for this kind of learning space. One participant mentioned that in one of the Cree communities of the Cree School Board there is a land area accessible by water where students are taken out to learn Cree skills on a weekly basis through their culture class. Participants agreed that if they had such space then Naskapi teachings could be part of the everyday learning and instruction. There are two spaces that are dedicated to learning of cultural skills and traditions within the community, whether the school uses these spaces for teaching purposes was not brought up.

Several of the examples mentioned by the participants demonstrate the two-world clash. They feel that there are plenty of opportunities to bridge the two worlds but the sense is that the dominant language and subject will always conquer. One participant mentioned how in the current woodworking class for high school, students are being asked to make bird-feeders which

is irrelevant to Naskapi culture. Instead, the participants suggested that students should be taught how to make Naskapi style sleds, or traditional tools with the help of the elders. Participants commented on how non-Naskapi teachers need to be made to understand the value of bringing this kind of teachings into the school and their responsibility in this.

Value of Language

There is an imbalance between the languages of Naskapi and English and its value within the school. Although staff might agree that Naskapi language is valuable to students, decisions currently being made or practices in place make it apparent that proficiency in English is the priority. Participants described this by the amount allocated yearly to be used to purchase books, resources and materials for the classrooms. Two participants said that for classrooms that teach English, \$500 is given to purchase English resources for instructional purposes. Three participants expressed this in frustration that there needs to be more funding towards the Naskapi language as well. Three participants said “Money is being used for other purposes. It should be put towards culture for the children.” This could be learning to make snowshoes, tools and made into books. One participant brought up the work done by Tshakapesh Institute, an organization that is dedicated to promoting Indigenous language, culture and traditions in Quebec, and how they have a lot of resources that are excellent, “They are coloured, with nice story books, with children in the illustration. All in the Innu language and ours are black and white”. One participant mentioned how the books designed by Tshakapesh Institute involved their own children in the illustrations. “Why can’t we do this with our kids?” was asked. How material is provided and purchased helps understand why participants believe that proficiency in English is more of a priority than of the Naskapi language.

Curriculum and Language Development: Material and Space

There is a Naskapi Curriculum office located in the school. This curriculum office is located in the old sector of the school, which is small and constricted in space. This office has a small closet and two smaller offices and an open working space. The small offices are spaces designed for one person, however there are at least two adults currently sharing these offices making it crowded to work in. The small closet is used to store most of the materials and resources. Participants described this closet as disorganized, making it difficult to find material and resources for their instruction. One commented, “Everything is dumped there. I don’t bother looking in there. I walk in and I shrug.” Due to the disorganization and space, participants commented that they would rather make their own material, showing that this space is not seen as a resource. Participants have expressed frustration that within the small space makes it difficult to use it to its full capacity. Participants also commented that when they have their team meetings, it would make sense to have it at the curriculum office, allowing for quick access to material and resources for planning purposes. Instead they meet in the Naskapi classroom, which is at another section of the school, far away from the library of material and resources.

In the last five years, JSMS extended the elementary wing of the school by building four large classrooms. With this extension, one classroom was made to be the Naskapi classroom where students from grade four to six go to for daily Naskapi class. The other classrooms were used for a computer lab and an English and French resource room. Participants brought up the issue that the larger classrooms were assigned to be the English and French resource rooms. Participants wondered why one of these classrooms was not assigned to be the new curriculum office. There was no mention whether all teachers were consulted when this decision was made. Some comments about space, “Even the curriculum room, it’s too small. But the French and

English have large rooms.” The perception of this from the teachers is that the Naskapi curriculum is not valued, “It’s like the Naskapi curriculum is not valued when it should be. It’s like we’re put on the side.” Having the curriculum office would help with the teachers as it would be right beside their classrooms. The current location of the curriculum office is out of their way.

Discussion

Two-Worlds: When One Overpowers the Other

The findings show that there is a two-world divide under one roof at this community school serving the Naskapi Nation. However, with the image of two-worlds, one overpowers the other, causing one world to be invisible or silenced and ignored: Elders are not a priority, learning only occurs in the classroom, and there is no funding put towards resources and materials to enrich Naskapi language and learning. Clearly, the world that is being overpowered is the one that represents Naskapi language, culture and identity. It is overcome by the one that asserts white, settler-colonial policies, practices and perceptions in place (Ball, 2007; Battiste, 2005; Deer, 2013; TRC, 2015). The legacy of colonial government control of policies on education is visible at this school (Battiste, 2013) in the examples of silencing, ignoring and denigrating the Naskapi language, culture and identity. Despite the clear message emphasized by the TRC (2015b) that all Canadians must begin decolonizing, we see how history continues to repeat itself at this school. Through the voices of the Naskapi teachers, it is clear that they experience the feelings of the two worlds on a day to day basis. They experience the complexity of language, culture and identity everyday by just simply being in the school and trying to walk in the two worlds. This leads to Naskapi teachers at this school to struggle to keep hope of including their world in the school when White settler-colonial racist policies and practices

continue to challenge them (Kawharu, 2014; Kirkness, 1998). They are challenged daily: How can we influence other teachers, who do not even recognize this struggle exists? How does one acknowledge that the colonial racist policies and practices silence the marginalized?

Disconnect Between Language Policies and Practices

The two-world divide in the school currently in place does not allow for all teachers to see the disconnect between language policies and practices, nor how current school policies and practices hold Eurocentric views on what learning is. Thus, not all teachers see that Indigenous languages have a critical link to Indigenous knowledge and to the survival of the culture. Language use must be part of every day and relevant activities that are meaningful to the learner that go beyond the classroom and extend to the land (Ledoux, 2006). An environment that honours and values Indigenous culture, language and world view not only nurture self-esteem of the learner but is critical for school success (Toulouse, 2008). However, based on the Eurocentric model of education currently in place, Indigenous children “continue to be caught between two cultures and is therefore outside of and between both” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 270). The legacy of having languages strategically and systematically denied through colonial policies and practices on education is occurring at this school. Through the participants' voices, we see that the importance of Naskapi language is not seen. If Naskapi language is not even mentioned in the policies (like the MESA), the idea of a sense of belonging in the school is not evident.

The Significance of Views of Language

Having the Indigenous language as the medium of instruction in the early years is crucial as it promotes identity, self-esteem, language fluency, language development; most importantly, it ensures that students continue to maintain Indigenous language, which carries their worldviews and world of being (Cantoni, 1997; Cummins et. al, 2005; Cummins, 2009; Serna, 2009; Wright

& Taylor, 2001; Visser & Fovet, 2014). However, the participants believe that they hold different views of the value of the Naskapi language as the medium of instruction language compared to non-Naskapi teachers. In returning to the literature, Battiste (2013) writes:

Language provides a sense of belonging, a sense of continuity among a collective, and a deep connection to a knowledge system that grounds the individual to a place, a history, and an ancestral heritage to the people who continue to use and grow in and through that language. (p. xii)

The Naskapi teachers acknowledge that Naskapi language is not just about being proficient in the language, but that there are deeper layers of what the Naskapi language includes. Unfortunately, this is not what the participants experience related to how non-Naskapi teachers see language. Participants believe the latter see language as codes, a set of words and a way to express oneself, distant from seeing language as a worldview. It needs to be known and understood that the Indigenous languages that have survived a destructive colonization process are increasingly threatened by the rising power and prevalence of the dominant languages of English and French (Usborne, et. al, 2011). Participants report that opportunities to discuss this topic do not occur, and they believe teachers are blinded by policies and practices in place. Even though policies like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or the NEQA (INAC, 1978) can be seen as a way to bridge the two-worlds and engage in this discussion, they are not being used at this school. Instead, learning of the Naskapi language is seen and acted on through monolingual mind frame and seen through deficits views, with no awareness beyond this. Battiste (2013) stresses that “if there is no recognition of, and appreciation for, Indigenous languages in state policies and practices, these languages will vanish from neglect, hegemony of power relations over languages, and official support for other

languages” (p. 146). How does a school, that ignores or does not notice the monolingual mind frames and deficits views of the Naskapi language, begin to see the Naskapi language as a worldview and world of being? What can be done to move past the idea that language learning is only about fluency, proficiency and development?

Learning Naskapi language, culture, and identity must be done as a collective and as a shared responsibility of everyone. However, how can this shared responsibility happen when there are deficit views of language and disengagement or limited motivation to learn about the community? What Naskapi teachers want are: a school that values Naskapi principles such as seeing the language as a way of knowing and being; elders involved in the education of the Naskapi children; learning occurring outside of school; a better recognition of Naskapi language by improving materials and space; and money put towards resources. However, the Naskapi teachers believe that non-Naskapi people in the school do not understand the complexities of the language, culture, identity and their responsibility as teachers in the community. Do the non-Naskapi teachers not feel responsible to find out about the Naskapi language and culture?

Battiste (2013) suggests that it takes “strong grassroots activity and community members being actively involved in planning, organizing, and implementing of these programs” (p. 151). Elder presence was brought up as a means of learning of Naskapi language, culture and identity. How can the Naskapi curriculum office in the school become a resource for bridging the two-worlds?

Future Directions

First Nations peoples have a special relationship with the earth and all living things in it; they are caretakers of Mother Earth. Everything is taken and used with the understanding that we

take only what we need, and we must use great care and be aware of consumption so that future generations will not be put in peril (AFN, 2007).

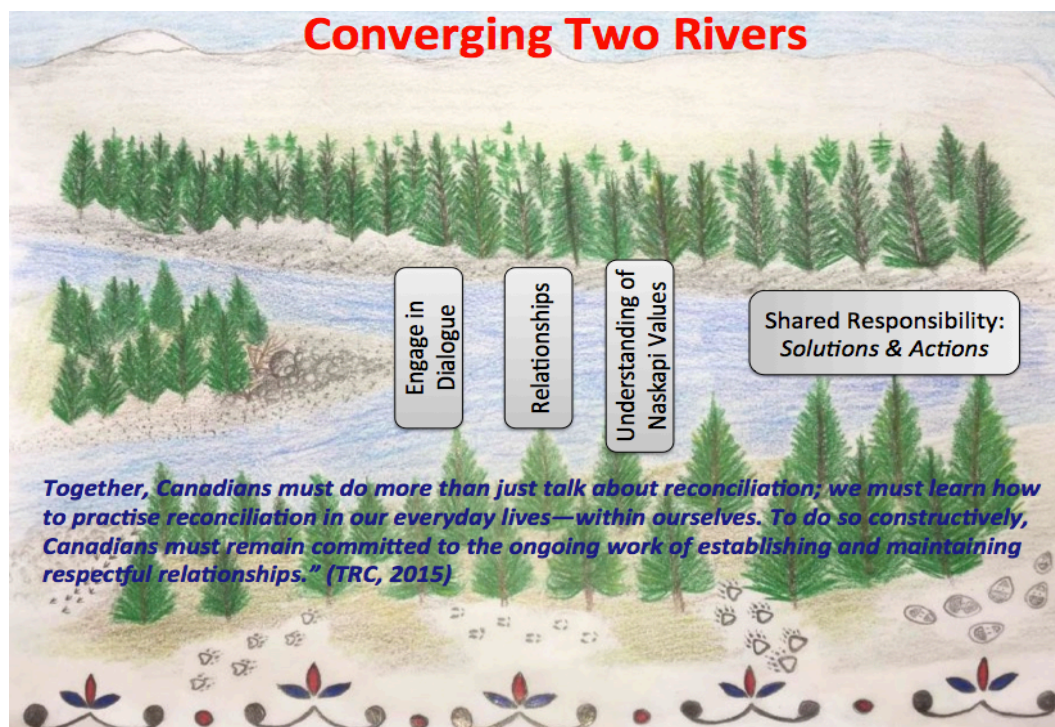


Figure 4: When Two-Rivers Merge into One, by Alexandra Uniam, Naskapi artist

The two rivers in the above illustration represent the two-world divide in the school. (See Figure 4) One river is Naskapi ways of knowing and learning and opposite of that is the westernized ways of knowing and learning. Each river flows at their own pace, with their own purpose and own understanding of what learning is. It is time to merge these two rivers into one.

Merging two rivers into one can only begin by engaging in dialogue, which honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and where much is to be gained by seeking the soul of the peoples (Battiste, 2000; Kovach, 2010). By engaging in dialogue, we enter a space that allows for everyone to rebalance, repair, rebuild or build relationships that have been damaged due to historical, social and political influences. This then leads to creating a deepened critical

awareness of reality (RCAP, 1996). It is important that the dialogue and conversation is rich and open between all members thus permitting everyone to decide what is important and why. This should pay attention to the frames that construct what we know and sometimes must learn and unlearn.

The situation in this school shows the importance of everyone's role in reconciliation. As the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission reminds us, it will take many heads, hands, and hearts, working together, at all levels of society to maintain momentum in the years ahead (2015a). We need to build open and trustful relationships, as the biggest challenge are historical, social and political influences that have left scars on the lives of many Indigenous people, on communities, as well as on Canadian society (TRC, 2015a). We need to expand public dialogue and action on reconciliation; it will be critical in the coming years (TRC, 2015b). In considering the school, it will be important to move toward expanding the dialogue and taking action on reconciliation, then all stakeholders will be able to see the Naskapi values as critical and important and begin seeing Indigenous knowledge as a pedagogy. Non-Naskapi teachers would become aware of their role and responsibility as sharing the success of students within the school. The work of reconciliation must continue in ways that honour the ancestors, respect the land, and rebalance relationships (TRC, 2015b).

Together, Canadians must do more than just *talk* about reconciliation; we must learn how to *practise* reconciliation in our everyday lives—within ourselves. To do so constructively, Canadians must remain committed to the ongoing work of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships. (TRC, 2015, p. 20)

The next step for this research will be to plan for action by sharing the power and control, through building another research project – with the community (Bishop, 2003). By talking and

practicing reconciliation then we begin to work on solutions and action. I recommend that we take a research-based approach to designing an induction program for non-Naskapi teachers. This induction process would provide a support system for all teachers coming to work in the community of Kawawchikamach. With the support and voice of community members, a system would be in place that includes orientation to the community, understanding of the language and culture of the Naskapi and neighbouring communities and other important essentials. It would be a start to the idea of Indigenous capacity building “on our terms and for our own purposes” (Porsanger, 2010, p. 435).

Conclusion

Many researchers have shown that when schools respect and support a child’s Indigenous culture and language they demonstrate significantly better outcomes (Haque & Patrick, 2015). Decolonizing perspectives, policies and practices that are grounded in Indigenous knowledges are a vital approach to bring greater success for Indigenous students while preserving cultural identities and Indigenous languages (Haque & Patrick, 2015). By doing this, we open up a space to engage in dialogue. By allowing for this kind of space, we listen to the voices that have been silenced and ignored and we begin to realize what we were not aware of. In order for the two-world to become one, we must hear of the Naskapi teachers and their experiences and see them as a passage for the success and continued growth of Naskapi children. Everyone has a role and responsibility to play but this is not obvious if we do not engage in dialogue with those around us.

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Appendix 1: Letter of Consent

LETTER OF CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

TO BE STATED IN NASKAPI OR ENGLISH FOR ORAL CONSENT

RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE

You've been invited to participate in a study that will contribute to our understanding of Indigenous language policy and practice at your community school, Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (JSMS). The study is entitled Indigenous Language Policy and Practice: Beliefs of Teachers from the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach.

PREAMBLE

Please read the following information concerning the study to be conducted and sign below if you agree to participate.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Loretta Robinson, graduate student of the School of Education, is conducting this research project under the supervision of Dr. Avril Aitken at Bishop's University, Sherbrooke, Québec. The purpose of the study is to investigate Naskapi teachers' beliefs on Indigenous language policy and practice at JSMS, Kawawachikamach, Qc, where Indigenous language is spoken and used for teaching and learning in the early grades. Naskapi teaches refers to member of the Naskapi Nation of Kawawachikamach who teach Naskapi language or use Naskapi or English when teaching.

PROCEDURES

If you agree to be involved in this project, you will participant in a small discussion group of 3-4 people. The length of the session will be 90 minutes. You will be asked open-ended questions about your views on language, you experience, and practices and policy about language in the school. You may answer in Naskapi or English. The discussion will be audio-recorded and will be transcribed and I will look for themes. When I have identified themes, you may be invited to have a short (one on one) conversation of 30 to 45 minutes about the themes, through Skype, Facebook video or phone call. This will help me interpret what is being said, especially around policy and practice in the school. This second step is not required. You can participate in the small group discussions without participating in the one-on-one discussion about the themes.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW

By choosing to remain for the focus group (today), you are showing your consent to participate in the research project. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You do not have to respond to any questions that make you uncomfortable. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time with no consequences, and to request that identifiable data

be destroyed. If you withdraw from the focus group, your individual recorded comments will remain in the transcript only long enough to allow me to understand other participant's comments, after which point they will be removed. If you withdraw, your comments will not be treated as data, nor will you be quoted.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The recorded interviews will only be accessible to me, Loretta Robinson. The transcriptions will be available to me and my supervisor, Dr. Aitken (but only in my presence). Transcriptions will be removed from the computer and will be stored on a password protected external hard drive in my home, and will be retained for a period of five years, after which it will be electronically deleted. All data collected will be confidential and the property of the researcher and will be used only for this project. There will be no identifying quotes or individual situations nor will specific examples be used. Any details that might risk identifying individual participants will be removed (age, years of service). General statements that you make, that are not identifiable may be used to help explain a theme. Upon request you have access to the data you have provided in an anonymized summary format. The information collected over the course of this research project may be published in scientific/academic journals or shared with other persons during scientific discussions. Any reports of this study will contain information that reflects group results and not information about specific individuals. Participants' identities will be kept private and not evident in any publication, however because of the group discussion format, other participants will be aware of your comments. Respecting the confidentiality of the group discussion is required. In order to be informed of any publication, participants may give their email address and phone number to the researcher.

POTENTIAL RISKS

With the perspectives of Indigenous teachers often being overlooked in decisions (Fyn, 2015), having these conversations on practice and policy could cause some distress or resistance to openly sharing your views. For example, because the school is a very small school and everyone knows each other, there may be topics that arise that lead you to recall negative experiences or conflicts, or embarrassments.

Because you are from a small and unique community there is a small risk that individuals may be identified through the publications. As indicated above, all efforts will be made to ensure that you cannot be identified.

You will be in a small group of four, and you will know ahead of time who will be in the group. You do not have to respond to any questions that make you uncomfortable or cause you concern. You have the right to withdraw from this project at any time with no consequences.

I will provide you with the names of Elders. You may reach out to them if you need it.

During the conversations you are asked to avoid naming specific individuals and to respect the privacy and confidentiality of each of the participants in the group. You are also asked to seek the permission of another participant before telling about an experience if it involves the other person or family member or close other.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

This study will document Naskapi teachers' beliefs on Indigenous language policy and practice at Jimmy Sandy Memorial School (JSMS). The findings of the study may contribute to strengthening Indigenous language and policy and practice in schools, at a time when there are calls for the Federal Government to support language preservation and revitalization. The study will also inform and expand discussion among current and future teachers seeking to teach at this, or similar, community schools where Indigenous languages are spoken or taught.

CONTACT INFORMATION

Loretta Robinson can be reached at 581-999-0207 and lrobinson03@ubishops.ca. The research supervisor, Dr. Avril Aitken can be reached at 819-822-9600, ext. 2657. The University's Research Ethics Board approved this project on [Insert date of REB approval]. If participants have any concerns regarding this project, they may contact Dr. Claude Charpentier, Chair of the Research Ethics Board, at 819-822-9600, ext. 2653, or by e-mail at ccharpen@ubishops.ca, or Dr. Miles Turnbull, Vice-Principal Academic at 819-822-9600, ext. 2227, or by e-mail at mturnbul@ubishops.ca.

CONSENT (DECLARATION OF PARTICIPANT)

I have read and understand the terms of the present consent form. If I decide to stay for the focus group, I have accepted to participate in the study with the terms of participation described. I have made this decision based on the information I have received about it, and I accept its stipulations. I hereby accept to participate in this study with the terms of participation.

N. B.: Two copies of the Letter of Consent must be signed, one of which is to be kept by the participant and the other by the principal investigator. Consent will also be audio-recorded during the conversations.