



January 2016

Elders' Teachings about Resilience and its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities

John G. Hansen

University of Saskatchewan, john.hansen@usask.ca

Rose Antsanen

University of Saskatchewan, roa353@campus.usask.ca

Recommended Citation

Hansen, J. G. , Antsanen, R. (2016). Elders' Teachings about Resilience and its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 7(1).

DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2016.7.1.2

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Abstract

This study developed out of a need to discuss Eurocentrism in Indigenous education and to provide what the Elders describe as an appropriate educational experience. The purpose of the study was, within a northern context, to discuss Indigenous education, and how educators and Elders perceived their cultural models, values, and aspirations of Indigenous resilience. This study deals with Indigenous resilience based on knowledge held by Indigenous educators and Elders with respect to the traditional teachings and values within Indigenous cultures in Northern Manitoba. We present the perspectives held by these constituents with respect to the notions of Indigenous resiliency. Two Indigenous researchers of Dene and Cree nations share their perspectives based on interviews with Indigenous Elders about traditional education in Northern Manitoba. Interview results demonstrate that a traditional, culturally appropriate model of education is significant to Indigenous resilience development.

Keywords

Eurocentrism, Dene and Cree culture, Indigenous resilience, northern education, traditional knowledge

Acknowledgments

To the Elders of the University College of the North.

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Elders' Teachings about Resilience and its Implications for Education in Dene and Cree Communities

This study developed out of concern that there is a need to discuss the concept of resilience in Indigenous education and to provide what the Elders describe as an appropriate educational experience. Such appropriate education assumes that Western Eurocentric education has had some inappropriate and detrimental effects on Indigenous people. Some scholars observe that Indigenous students underachieve in school because a Eurocentric curriculum alienates them (Adams, 2000; Hesch, 1999; Silver, 2013). Therefore, it is understandable that the Elders advise that educational programming ought to incorporate traditional knowledge and culture in order to make schooling more relevant and culturally appropriate to practical life in the community. Although this article deals primarily with Dene and Cree culture, the experiences relating to colonization and resilience apply to many other Indigenous peoples in Canada.

The motive for dealing with the Dene and Cree of Northern Manitoba is our cultural affiliation with the people of that region. We were born and raised in Northern Manitoba are of biracial identity and cultures: the first author is Cree–Danish; and the second author is Dene–German. Each of us has an Indigenous mother and a non-Indigenous father. Since we are providing an interpretation of the Elders' teachings, we have developed the cultural discussion from our own Indigenous vantage points as much as possible. We hope that our interpretation will contribute to the literature on Dene and Cree culture and resilience.

The purpose of this article is to explore educational approaches that support resilience among Indigenous learners in modern education systems. These approaches are grounded in the notion that resilience was a foundational part of Indigenous education; however, it has been undermined, or challenged by a history of colonialism and Eurocentrism. Therefore, this article provides considerable discussion on fostering educational approaches that support resilience.

The first section of the article provides a general discussion of how resilience was understood and developed in traditional Indigenous cultures, and will lead into the broader literature on resilience as it relates to traditional understandings. The second section discusses how colonialism, including residential schools and Eurocentrism, erode the foundation on which resilience is cultivated in traditional cultures. Section three introduces the Elders and the research methodology, which develops the foundation for the Elders' discussion of how to reclaim and incorporate components that support resilience as part of formal and informal education systems in the modern context of Cree and Dene communities. The final section concludes the article as a whole, and provides policy recommendations.

How Resilience is Understood in Indigenous Cultures

There is a debate surrounding the concept of resilience. The notion that resilience is a quality that some people have and others have not is not only incorrect but misleading because it implies that nature alone is responsible for resilience. The reality is that resilience is a process that can be acquired and developed. Understood this way, resilience is a process that practically any person can learn to develop. According to Wieland and Wallenburg, (2013) resilience is the “ability to cope with change” (p. 300). Scholars who have studied Indigenous peoples have made attempts to describe how traditional teachings and culture play an important role in the development of coping strategies and resilience among Indigenous

peoples (Chandler & Lalonde, 2008a, 2008b; Hansen, 2015a; Silver, 2013; Waldram, 2004; Wastesicoot, 2015).

Indigenous concepts of resilience can be understood as arising out of the ability to be flexible and having a vision about how to succeed. As Valaskakis, Stout, and Guimond (2009) advised:

Resilience is the polar opposite of rigidity. It provides an alternate perspective to the more usual scenarios that emphasize Indigenous disadvantage and allows the Indigenous challenge to be reconfigured as a search for success rather than an explanation of failure. (p. 42)

This passage illustrates that having a positive self-concept and a sense of culture have been major factors in the development of educational success. However, Indigenous identity has been constructed alongside stereotypes, “often marked with negative undertones, and the images of the ‘drunken Indian’ and/or ‘Indian outlaw,’ which have dominated society for so long [they] are now recognized as colonial stereotypes” (Hansen & Antsanen, 2015, p. 84). These stereotypes serve to encourage Indigenous learners to internalize negative and shameful feelings toward themselves. Therefore, resilience among Indigenous students in education is manifest in their ability to balance negative and positive feelings about the way they perceive and feel about themselves and the world (Adams, 2000; Commission on First Nations and Métis People [CFNMP], 2004; Hansen, 2015a). Indigenous interpretations of resilience involve “the capability of individuals to cope and flourish successfully in the face of significant adversity or risk” (Reid, Stewart, Magnum, & McGrath, 1996/1997, p. 84). Therefore, traditional teachings and culture are linked to Indigenous resilience. Hansen and Antsanen (2015) described such traditional teaching, specifically recognizing the spiritual dimension to living well in Dene culture:

Living well together is a commonly held notion in Dene culture and this concept is expressed in the language. For example, “Dene dewh doli dene hina” conveys a message about the history of the hardship of the people. For example, the Dene word “Dene dewh doli”, usually conveys the ability to live even in the face of adversary, “Dene hina,” the people survived. The Dene believe that survival was possible because of their belief in “Dedi yeh,” the Great Spirit, or “Ne whol shi ni” the Creator. (p. 62)

Dene culture’s spiritual dimension has been used to inspire and develop learners. Although these traditional teachings were suppressed for generations, Indigenous people must be credited with the ability of ensuring the continued existence of their traditional cultures and ways of knowing.

However, relatively recently there has been an increase in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars who are producing favorable interpretations of Indigenous people and culture, which contribute to Indigenous peoples’ psychological well-being, or mental health. For example, Waldram (2004) composed a fitting interpretation of the matter between traditional knowledge and modern day applications:

Indigenous conceptualizations . . . tend to define what types of knowledge and behaviors are necessary to function within specific cultures . . . an expert Inuit hunter will be lauded for his skills at survival and tracking animals . . . Similarly, the courtroom skills demonstrated by an Aboriginal lawyer will also be celebrated, a fact which confounds those who see Indigenous knowledge and skills as oriented only to the past. (p. 95)

This passage by Waldram indicates that Indigenous knowledge is not a relic of the past, but rather it still exists as an adaption to life in a changing world. Indigenous people adapt to stress and adversity through Indigenous knowledge, which emphasizes the need for balance.

Decolonization and Resilience

There is a growing awareness that decolonization of Indigenous education and culture is linked to Indigenous resilience. According to Smith (1999) Indigenous education is part of a decolonizing movement that seeks to restore the cultural ideas and practices of dominated peoples. Smith (1999) notes that, “cultural survival, self-determination, healing, restoration and social justice are engaging Indigenous researchers and Indigenous communities in a diverse array of projects” (p. 142). Decolonization promotes an Indigenous model of resilience in a very real sense: It is not just a set of beliefs. It has developed into a finely tuned model of Indigenous resiliency. As Chandler and Lalonde (1998) noted, those Indigenous communities “that have taken active steps to preserve and rehabilitate their own cultures are shown to be those in which youth suicide rates are dramatically lower” (p. 191). Therefore, Indigenous communities do well when they restore their cultural traditions from a history of colonial suppression.

According to Wesley-Esquimaux (2009), resiliency is “the ability to rebound from challenges one encounters in daily life” (Resiliency and Recovery section, para. 1). However, Indigenous peoples are nations within a colonial state who have a different experience than other Canadians. Therefore, resiliency has a much broader meaning in the Indigenous world. As McGuire–Kishebakabaykwe (2010) observed:

Whole generations of children were taken away with some Anishinaabe families having multiple generations of children removed. Yet, in spite of these overwhelming challenges, Anishinaabe still maintain their identities, languages, and cultures. This continuity is community resilience . . . Indigenous place-based resilience requires understanding the traditions and sustained relationships with the land. Relationships are embedded in the land. (p. 122)

This passage illustrates that Anishinaabe languages and cultural understandings are still alive. Parenthetically, in Canada, the Anishinaabe are Indigenous peoples who are also known as Ojibwa and/or Salteaux and they live throughout Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario.

Consistent with the Anishinaabe teachings is the spiritual connection to the land, and this relationship is reflected in the Dene language. The Dene word “ne holt hi ne” translates as the “one who created the land,” which suggests the spiritual relationship the Dene people have with the land (Antsanen, 2014). The old Dene people still teach us that the land should not be sold or destroyed. To our way of thinking, the Denesuline have developed coping strategies that enable them to overcome crisis and be a resilient people. Traditional knowledge has allowed the people to effectively thrive on the land for thousands of years. Therefore, it is understandable that the land is vital in many Indigenous cultures. The Dene Kede (1993) stated, “our continued survival requires us to be respectful in a respectful relationship with the land, all its animals, the spiritual world, other people and ourselves” (p. 3). These teachings harmonize with the Dene concept “a si ho roe e sah,” which connotes the importance of being humble; that is, seeing oneself as a steward of the land rather than having dominion over it. The Dene Kede (1993) curriculum model advocates that the younger generations perpetuate the traditions:

There is a need to root ourselves in tradition, not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the future. Our children, with the gift of their culture, can work towards ensuring our future survival as well as the survival of human kind. This became our vision statement and we started creating a curriculum to this as being the central vision. (p. 3)

This passage illustrates the importance of respectful interaction between people, the land, and the animals. In the context of Dene Kede cultural teachings, the four specific orientations are ideas that relate specifically to the land, the self, the people, and the spiritual world. These holistic teachings integrate the Dene worldview into the curriculum:

Spiritual: these expectations help students in understanding or connecting with the spiritual understandings that the Dene have with respect to fish; Land: these expectations help students develop the skills and knowledge that the Dene have with respect to the physical aspects of fish and fishing; Other People: these expectations help students understand how the Dene relate to each other, as determined by activities associated with fish or fishing; Self: these expectations help students reflect on the significance of the spirituality, knowledge and skills. (Dene Kede, 1993, p. 3)

Such teachings demonstrate a pedagogy that advocates respect for all life. It teaches us that all life is connected and that the fish are an integral part of existence. As with the dominant culture, Indigenous peoples such as the Denesuline want to reproduce our culture and traditions for future generations. The Dene word “dene ho roe ee sah” connotes that self-respect is connected to respecting others; it takes into account that if one harms others, harm will come to them. It is to express that the energy you send out comes back to you—a sort of Karma. This reciprocal concept helps to explain why the Dene and Cree perceive the relationship with the spirit, the people, the community, the animals, and the land as interconnected (Antsanen & Hansen, 2012; Campbell, 1973; Hansen, 2015c). To our way of thinking, having a non-Eurocentric understanding of Indigenous identity and an optimistic outlook on life is a characteristic of resilience.

How Colonialism and Eurocentrism Erode the Foundation Indigenous Resilience

In Canada, the criminal justice system has been used to colonize Indigenous ways of thinking and being, often by laws that outright discriminate against Indigenous peoples. Sutherland (2002) claimed that “any resistance to these laws were made illegal and contributed to eroding Indigenous political structures” (p. 6). She observed:

It was illegal for First Nations people to go to court to sue the Government of Canada without previous permission from the government . . . Some laws and policies were directed at the heart of First Nations’ culture and spirituality. For example gatherings such as potlatches were outlawed while Christmas celebrations were encouraged . . . It was illegal to practice traditional healing . . . When attempts to disrupt economic, political, and spiritual infrastructures did not sufficiently assimilate “Indians,” children became the targets. (p. 6)

These kinds of strategies demonstrate the nature of colonialism’s erosion of Indigenous culture. A dominant discourse has largely ignored Indigenous perspectives and culture until relatively recently. Historically, school textbooks and curriculum have devoted very little discussion to the Indigenous

experience (Adams, 1975; Hansen & Antsanen, 2015). Although the Indigenous community received some attention, it was largely as the scene of colonial activities—such as residential schools—and most of what was mentioned about Indigenous societies was from a Eurocentric point of view¹. However, because Indigenous identities have been constructed negatively by Eurocentric thinkers, historians, academics, and writers, racial stereotypes penetrated deeply into the mainstream society. Such Eurocentric interpretations and stereotypes have played an important role in the development of socioeconomic disparities between Indigenous peoples and the dominant group.

The present educational disparities cannot be understood without examining Eurocentric education and its ideology. As a rule, Indigenous learners are schooled in an education system that is grounded in the interests and ideals of the colonizer. It reflects what Hesch (1999) called “settler interests” (p. 3). As a result, Indigenous learners are positioned at a disadvantage while members of the dominant group are at an advantage, which creates and sustains prevailing educational disparities between the Indigenous peoples and the dominant group. For instance, Eurocentrism creates or perpetuates inequality in education and in the wider social and economic conditions through evaluation standards that are culturally biased in favour of the dominant group. According to Sensoy and DiAngelo (2012) schools reproduce inequality in the following ways:

Mandatory culturally biased testing; “ability” tracking; a primarily White teaching force with the power to determine which students belong in which tracks; cultural definitions of intelligence, what constitutes it, and how it is measured; and standards of what constitutes good behaviour as determined by White teachers and administration. Rather than serving as the great equalizer, schools function in actual practice to reproduce racial inequality. (p. 129)

This educational set-up illustrates some of the ways in which racial disparities in society are created and sustained, resulting in further racial inequality, as Picard (2012) observed:

The unemployment and poverty rates are five times those in the non-Aboriginal community . . . Only 4 per cent of Natives have a university education, one-quarter the rate in mainstream society. One-third of Aboriginal people do not graduate high school, three times the rate for non-Aboriginals. (p. 1)

Not only are Indigenous people underrepresented in educational achievement, but they also suffer from unemployment and poverty to a much higher degree than others in Canada. Therefore, Indigenous students demonstrate resilience when they succeed in education.

Perhaps the most stressful or adverse experiences that colonized peoples must cope with is Eurocentrism. This is no small task: Eurocentrism is embedded within the culture and discourse throughout the Western world, particularly educational curriculum. It promotes myths that serve to oppress Indigenous peoples. Such Eurocentric and dominant discourse has been used to colonize Indigenous ways of thinking (Adams, 2000; Blaut, 1993). According to Adams (2000), many of the Indigenous elite have become collaborators with the oppressor and “some Native academics write Indian and Metis history with a strictly Eurocentric interpretation” (p. 51). Therefore, Eurocentric

¹ This is the notion that Indigenous peoples are racially and culturally inferior to Western European colonizers (Adams, 2000; Blaut, 1993; Hansen & Antsanen, 2015).

education is a powerful way of colonizing Indigenous ways of thinking. It does this in various ways, but most significantly it teaches the values, language, culture, and history of the colonizer. As a result, the colonized come to understand the world from a Eurocentric point of view (Adams, 2000; Blaut, 1993).

In his book, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*, Blaut (1993) claimed that Eurocentrism is more than a concept; it is “a label for all the beliefs that postulate past or present superiority of Europeans over non-Europeans (and over minority people of non-European descent)” (p. 8). Since Eurocentrism views Europe as the intellectual centre of the world, it asserts that innovation spreads from Europe (the centre) to the outside Indigenous world, which Blaut (1993) called “Eurocentric diffusionism” (p. 1). As a result, Indigenous peoples are viewed as “naturally inferior to Europeans, naturally less brave, less freedom-loving, less rational, and so on, and progress for them depended on the acceptance of European domination” (Blaut, 1993, p. 20). According to the theory of Eurocentric diffusionism, the Indigenous community does not contribute valid knowledge to the Western world. Eurocentric education therefore, does not value Indigenous culture and language.

Even today, when a Dene or Cree student has, for example, an accent, the teacher may assume that the student is “backward” and inferior (Adams, 1975; Hansen & Antsanen, 2015). These Eurocentric perceptions serve to marginalize Indigenous students. Although the student demonstrates an understanding of the topic, the teacher may rate their performance as substandard and thereby thwart the student's success (Adams, 1975; CFNMP, 2004; Hansen, 2015b). Unfortunately, many Indigenous peoples are familiar with the negative constructs associated with Indigenous identity—lazy, drunkards, unintelligent, having an accent, and so on. Of course, all of this contributes to the alienation of Indigenous peoples. Despite their racialization, Indigenous students are able to cope with negative experiences and some succeed in a Western education system.

The Elders

Five Omushkigo (Swampy Cree) Elders in Northern Manitoba contributed to this study. The Swampy Cree, or Omushkegowuk (which means “people of the muskeg”) are the Cree people who live throughout Northern Ontario (along James and Hudson's Bay) and Northern Manitoba. The language spoken by the Omushkegowuk people is the “n-dialect”; this group also refers to themselves as the Inninew, which means the people.

Stella Neff, a respected Elder from Mispawistik Cree Nation or Grand Rapids First Nation, a Cree community approximately 400 kilometers north of Winnipeg, Manitoba on Highway 6. Stella did not attend Indian residential school, and grew up with traditional teachings, and spent a substantial amount of time on the land. The Elders in her community taught her lessons for life in relation to the traditional teachings of her people.

Sylvia Hansen is a respected Elder born on the Opaskwayak Cree Nation in 1937 and for the most part grew up in her home community. Although Sylvia experienced two years in residential school, she continues to identify with the culture and worldview of the Omushkegowuk. She continues to speak the language of the people despite the fact that the residential schools suppressed the language. Sylvia is knowledgeable about the stories, unspoken nuances, and values within Omushkegowuk societies.

William G. Lathlin is a respected Elder who sits on the Opaskwayak Restorative Justice Committee of Opaskwayak Cree Nation. He is a residential school survivor and a former chief of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation who has much knowledge of the people of Opaskwayak. He knows the families that comprise Opaskwayak, and he is highly respected by the people in the community. William has a sense of humor and he is a good speaker in both the Cree and English languages.

John Martin is recognized by many as a traditional Elder. He is the resident Elder at the University College of the North in The Pas, Manitoba, and he performs ceremonies. He was born and raised on the Mosakahiken Cree Nation or Moose Lake reserve. Like many Indigenous children of his generation, he was sent to residential school during the 1950s. Having survived the ordeal, he was taught traditional teachings from his Elders, and has earned the respect of his community. John performs sweat lodge ceremonies, feasts, and traditional weddings.

Dennis Thorne, an Elder of mixed Indigenous ancestry—Cree and Ojibwa—was born in 1939 in Wanless, Manitoba, a small Métis community located about 50 kilometers north of Opaskwayak Cree Nation on Highway 10. Dennis did not attend Indian residential school and was taught traditional teachings by his elders. During the early 1980's, Dennis helped build some of the first sweat lodges behind Canadian prison walls.

Methodology

This section discusses the research methodology that applied tools of qualitative research. The participants are Indigenous Elders from Northern Manitoba and they were interviewed to understand how the Elders perceive and understand traditional Indigenous education. Creswell (1998) advised that qualitative research is suitable when the major research question asks “how” (p. 17). The Elders, for example, were asked, “can you tell me about traditional Cree education systems, and how traditional Cree values are passed on?” Therefore, this study is suitable for a qualitative research. As Creswell (1998) notes, in qualitative research, “the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting” (p. 15). The participants were interviewed on Opaskwayak Cree Nation at a time and place of their choosing. More specifically, using the research questions, researchers asked participants to discuss the way they see and understand the world as it relates to the traditional Cree education systems, how traditional Cree values are passed on, and the teaching of appropriate behaviour.

Data Collection

Data was collected via ethnographic methods that utilized traditional protocols for knowledge gathering. These traditional protocols included offering food, cloth, tobacco, and sweetgrass out of respect for the community researched. The ethnographic research methods incorporated into the data collection process include open-ended interviewing techniques, field notes, audiotaped conversations, and general observations. The on-site interviewing conversations were tape recorded with permission and were conducted in the traditional Omushkigo territory of Northern Manitoba.

Data Analysis

In keeping with an Indigenous holistic philosophy, in our analysis we organized the data into themes based on the teachings the Elders shared. Thus, we present a holistic analysis of Indigenous educational concepts and practices.

During the analysis, we searched for ideas and themes in relation to how the Elders discuss traditional teachings. Together they suggested that the ideological foundation for Indigenous education model emphasizes traditional teachings and culture. The knowledge the Elders shared provides a model that could contribute to decolonization of a traditional Indigenous education system from a history of colonialism. Decolonizing Indigenous education, therefore, involves researching the oral stories, histories, and teachings of our Elders. The participants expressed that notions of holism, the land, Indigenous languages, animals, stories, and spirituality are intrinsic to Indigenous education. Education among the Indigenous peoples has been principally connected to the land.

Presenting the Data

When asked, “Can you tell me about the traditional Cree education systems? How traditional Cree values are passed on?” Stella responded as follows:

The education systems that we had wasn’t confined to sitting on the floor and sitting on the desk, it was by example and when my grandmother sat down by the stove with the moose meat and gave me a little knife to teach me how to make meat for the rack and she would gently show me and I must have been very small because my grandmother passed away when I was 8 and I was copying her and that was the system by example the same with talking about things like misbehavior it was by example and that was how we were taught gently we didn’t get the stick like what was introduced, or like a strap like we got in school. It was by a gentle teaching and these values were passed on like respect and love for land and honesty and good behaviour . . . so the values were priceless for me and I’m so sorry that the system is gone.

Stella described the traditional education system as based on teaching by example and being taught gently. It speaks to the Indigenous principle of teaching gently and in doing so reciprocity occurs; that is, gentleness is returned. Such teachings diverge from the colonial public education Stella experienced.

In her response, Sylvia mentions that the education she received in the Opaskwayak community was largely related to living off the land. She stated:

The men used to teach the boys how to do the moose hunt, fish, and other work like cut trees, and they were experienced, they were very experienced in things like that type of work. And trapping [pause] . . . At that time, when we went to [school there was no running water. We had to melt the snow for water in the winter, and the river, ice, we had to go to the river and get some ice and then we had to cut down the wood for the stove. And the boys used to look after the horses, so all the kids seemed like they were working.

The above statements by Sylvia and Stella suggest that experiential teachings are a major aspect of Indigenous education. John Martin described such experiential teachings in his response:

Well, when we hear something we have to see it and experience it at the same time. That's the way our old people used to teach us about things you know. How you snare rabbits, something that's easy is things that they can tell you. How to hang your snare or how to make something, but the main thing was to do something, that's how I learned it, by doing. And when you make a mistake, like you might be putting the snare to close to the trees or to low or to high you learn from them. The old people might ask you why you never caught a rabbit and these are the ways in which the old people taught you: They might ask you what's wrong? How come you're not catching anything? Or why you're not snaring anything? So we have to figure it out ourselves, that's the way they used to teach us about everything, you do it and they'll find questions for you. What's wrong? How can you make it better or right? That's part of the way, I guess to educate us, because it was different in that time, to survive was important and if you didn't learn the person could freeze to death or starve if he doesn't know. So that was the main thing.

This passage illustrates that Indigenous education is connected to the land. Such education provided everything a learner needed to know in order to survive. William responds by expressing that the language of the people is significant and that he was learning about the medicines found on the land:

Our first teachers were our parents, and then our uncles, and then our grandparents. In my case I had the opportunity to learn the language from my grandfather from my mother's side. And then my grandmother on my dad's side and she began to teach me the medicine things.

William's grandmother was influential in teaching him the medicines. It was the grandmothers who usually taught young children about the medicines. This teaching is significant because medicine and healing are one of the same, and healing is significant to resilience. In terms of the women's actual roles, both males and females contribute to educational development in accordance with the learner's gender. As Dennis described:

Our mother was our first teacher healer and counselor. She fed us, doctored us, and made us happy. And as we grew older depending on whether we are male or female, our education was turned over to our uncles or aunts, our sisters or brothers, our older brothers . . . our grandparents to take over the education.

This quote reveals that the responsibility for educating the young is principally that of the mother—she is the first teacher, though the uncles, grandparents, and relatives also play a role in traditional education. However, the Elders, both male and female, together guided the education process.

In terms of traditional education, the Indigenous worldview is echoed in William's response when he spoke about the Indigenous worldview and traditional teachings:

Those teachings about how to make fish, how to make a fire without no matches and things like that. I learned all that, I had to as a man child. And because those are the things that you need to learn. But then the other teachings like being a parent, I didn't learn those because that's when I went to residential school. And those are the key teachings that I missed.

William reveals the Eurocentrism ingrained in the Indian residential school system; these schools destroyed the language of the people so that we could not communicate with each other, suppressed the

culture, and used physical punishment for overwhelming control. William suggests that the most devastating effects of the Eurocentric residential schools was the damage done to the family unit:

The impact of it has split up families, took away the children, and so some of the parents didn't really know the rules anymore. Because the state more-less invaded the home; it affected how the parents raise the child, and the responsibilities of how to raise the child and the consequences of their action or inaction. So those things changed.

The Elders illustrate that the suppression of language and culture devastated Indigenous families. They also show that Eurocentric education is detrimental to Indigenous communities. Forced changes to Indigenous culture are seen in William and Stella's perception of the Eurocentric Indian day and residential schools. In other words, Eurocentric education devastated children, the family unit, and the Indigenous way of life was changed forever. John also stated that:

A lot of a time when they're teaching you the person that knows a lot of things about life you need to respect that person. The way you need to respect these people who are teaching you like the instructors or the professors or whoever, you have to respect that person that's teaching you . . . You see in our life we are very spiritual people, this is very important, and when we think of animals, little rabbits, we ask that little rabbit to give its life for us. It's a spiritual thing, for us we connect that spiritual thing to what we learn in education. Because to relate those things that are being taught to us, we have to be able to listen, but when you know already, spiritually when you know, that's what I meant when I said "Inniew," a person of the four directions. So I use my mind, physically, emotionally, and spiritually that's what it means in Cree, Cree culture . . . In education you see, they only cover the two, knowledge and the physical. When you're teaching the students learning skills and you make them do the work, work skills is what you're teaching them, but sometimes people forget, and so people try to figure out why this person is not doing so good, why they don't know that or they forget that. But when you don't look at the emotional, spiritual part, because those two parts are not covered, and when we cover the emotional part and the spiritual part we understand.

For John, balance is important, and emotions as well as spiritual understanding are paramount in the traditional education system. He suggests that the emphasis on the mental and physical aspects in the mainstream education system results in learning difficulty because half of human existence is excluded. Therefore, Indigenous education includes the feelings and spiritual understandings (e.g., the effect on the environment). As Stella concurred:

My mother, I came from a family of 13 children I'm the oldest sister and my mother was always busy tending to the babies, and so I and my grandmother, my grandmother was Noreen from Easterville and then there was Nancy, and Sarah and we looked after the children. I was the oldest sister, so there was a responsibility of looking after and so the teaching of appropriate behaviour.

Stella's statement concurs that our mothers are our first teachers and that teaching the children appropriate behaviour was vital. However, Sylvia stated:

Well, some of those old people that I noticed in The Pas were over protecting their kids. At that time, if a kid did something wrong . . . [pause] . . . but not always, but I did see that they were over protecting their kids. They didn't send them to the boarding school those ones. So I guess in a way, at that time it is something the way we are now. If somebody did something wrong, they really weren't sent to jail. At that time, there weren't a lot of people like there are now.

It is interesting to note that at that time and place Sylvia mentions that the people did not rely on jails as a method to teach appropriate behaviour, which is understood as protecting the children.

The concept of trust was expressed when William was asked about worldview differences that relate to the teaching of appropriate behavior. Indeed, he was developing trust in his life on Opaskwayak until he was imprisoned in the residential school:

When I went to residential school my life got all mixed up. I lost the trust I had for the people . . . [pause] . . . because they sent me to this horrible place. But it wasn't their fault and I found that out later but it was too late. I had already . . . [pause] . . . thought it was their fault eh, but it was not really their fault. They were forced to do it . . . When my language was trying to be washed away with soap, I didn't know what they were doing. All I knew was that they gave me soap whenever I spoke, so I learned not to speak when they were around. So the first year 1950 was bad, the second year was all right, the third year and the fourth year was so-so, but this first year was so terrible.

William and Stella's testimonies both discuss the damage caused by the Eurocentric Indian residential and day schools including the destruction of the language of the people so that we could not communicate with each other. In the process, William speaks of how he lost that sense of "trust" in the residential school that is so central to a functioning family. William is not alone in his perception. Stella, Sylvia, Dennis, and John also recognize that the suppression of language and culture resulted in much of the social disarray of Indigenous families and communities. Thus, Eurocentric education played an important role in the development of trauma. It has prevented the Indigenous foundation of holism from continuing in the Indigenous world.

The concepts of spirituality and balance are recognizable when one considers the Indigenous view that plants and animals like humans have a spirit. It is a manifestation of the holistic worldview. as John Martin described it, the spirit is inherent in all that surrounds us—the trees, grass, rocks, etc.—which expresses the idea that existence is interconnected. John Martin also mentioned the spiritual dimension of traditional teachings:

Everything is spiritual, the trees are alive, the grass, the rocks, they have a spirit. The animals they have a spirit and so the ceremonies are based on those teachings . . . But when we do it our way, the proper way, the way of smudging, using the rock or the feather, the purpose is spiritual.

For John, an Omushkegowuk way of perceiving and understanding the world suggests that everything is alive, with spirit, feelings, and consciousness. The trees, plants, animals, grass, and water are alive and have a spirit. Stella, William, Dennis, and Sylvia also identified holism and spiritual beliefs and, like John, they understand the spiritual dimension in the traditional belief system. This was a common theme in the Elders' accounts of justice, in which they indicated that prayer is a crucial aspect of the culture. The

Elders demonstrate that spirituality is important in the education process, and consequently education involves the spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental aspects of the human being. The experience, in other words, is holism.

Identifying the Themes

In the table below, Indigenous teachings and the effects of Eurocentrism identified by the Elders are organized into themes.

Table 1. Indigenous Teachings and the Effects of Eurocentrism

Indigenous Teachings	The Effects of Eurocentrism
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teachings from the Elders• First languages• Spirituality• Traditional teachings• Holism• The land• Community• Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Residential school or public (day) school effects• Loss of language• Erosion of traditional teachings and values• Physical punishment• Colonial education• Social exclusion

Discussion of Themes

There were several negative effects of residential and public (day) schools: Eurocentric education was identified as major factor in the loss of language, traditional teachings, and values. Participants agreed that the estrangement from traditional values, teachings, and languages has negative effects on the Indigenous community. The result of such estrangement is a decrease in the capacity for resilience. Eurocentrism plays an important role in the subjugation of traditional teachings, language, and culture.

The thematic factors that can assist in promoting resiliency are traditional teachings, culture, community, first languages, spirituality, and identity. Although there are other ways of developing resiliency that do not come from traditional Indigenous culture, the participants indicated that a sense of positive Indigenous identity—that is not Eurocentric—is valuable.

Indigenous knowledge is not simply a relic of the past. It involves a complex of factors—Indigenous identity, values, languages, natural law and approaches to justice, and healing, all of which reinforce a culture and people. Indigenous knowledge is holistic knowledge, which shapes the current models of most Indigenous adult education programs available today (Hansen & Antsanen, 2015; Silver, 2013).

The Modern Context of Cree and Dene Communities and the Use of Indigenous Knowledge

Many people have heard of Indigenous knowledge as being grounded in the experiences and cultures of Indigenous peoples. In Northern Manitoba, for example, the University College of the North (UCN) claims to be committed to enhancing the use of Indigenous knowledge as a way to restore Indigenous

identities and communities. According to the UCN (2015) academic calendar, Indigenous knowledge is now integrated into all of its programs:

University College of the North is committed to providing all students with stimulating, supportive, relevant, and culturally grounded learning experiences. We acknowledge and celebrate the Aboriginal culture, traditions and spiritual values that are the root of the communities and people of Northern Manitoba. Students in certificate or diploma programs will all have the opportunity to participate in a course entitled, "Tradition and Change: An Aboriginal Perspective" and in doing so, will gain an understanding of how culture in general influences thought, behaviour, values, and attitudes. (p. 25)

While all types of new and innovative research arrives in classrooms and on university bookstore shelves every year, Indigenous knowledge has always been in the Indigenous community. Some scholars claim that Indigenous knowledge will not fade away as long as Indigenous peoples continue to exist as Indigenous peoples (Adams, 1975; Ermine, 1995; Wotherspoon & Hansen, 2013).

Indigenous people have a holistic way of knowing. According to Castellano (2000), Indigenous knowledge is grounded in holism and, as such, "all of the senses, coupled with openness to intuitive or spiritual insights, are required in order to plumb the depths of Aboriginal knowledge" (p. 29). The holistic interpretation contained in Indigenous knowledge draws together experience, spirituality, and what is observed in the world. Castellano (2000) further explained that "knowledge in Aboriginal societies derives from multiple sources, including traditional teachings, empirical observation, and revelation. These categories overlap and interact with one another, but they are useful for examining the contours of Aboriginal knowledge" (p. 23). Therefore, one of the main characteristics of Indigenous knowledge is that it emphasizes a holistic view of the world, and looks at things as a larger whole. In Indigenous education, the more a program or course is looked at holistically the more culturally appropriate it becomes, which promotes student success and this development is reflected in current research. As Silver (2013) maintains:

Various adult education strategies that are generally consistent with this broad theoretical approach have emerged in recent years in Winnipeg's inner city. Although each is slightly different from the other, they all use a curriculum and a way of teaching that is culturally appropriate and consistent with the experience and the needs of those who have lived lives of poverty and social exclusion. Additionally, they produce graduates whose lives have been transformed by the experience and a high proportion of whom become active in producing positive change in their inner city communities. (Silver, 2013, p. 12)

Our adventure into Indigenous adult education at the university has inevitably influenced our way of thinking and being. It is important to note that both authors have graduated from post-secondary programs that are grounded in strong Indigenous teachings—specifically, Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, now called First Nations University of Canada. These post-secondary programs were instrumental in developing our resilience.

Conclusions

This study discussed the concept of resilience in Indigenous education. Drawing on the wisdom of the Cree Elders and our own personal frame of reference and experience, we have presented an example of Indigenous culture in Northern Manitoba. Such teachings advocate respect for the land, the self, the people, and the spiritual world.

Resilience in education can be developed through Indigenous constructs such as identifying and re-examining traditional teachings, which can be accomplished by discussions with Elders. For the Elders, culture and language are crucial to Indigenous resilience in education. Our ancestors were resilient, and they taught us to respect ourselves and others, as well as the land and the spiritual world. The teachings described by the Elders resonate with the northern Dene Kede model of education. Such Indigenous teachings enabled the people to live well in the past and they are what we should continue to practice in order to promote Indigenous resilience and wellbeing in the present day.

Policy Recommendations

- a. This study recommends that federal governments increase support for Indigenous education. More specifically, Indigenous education requires significant increases in core funding to provide culturally appropriate and successful educational outcomes.
- b. This study recommends expanding Indigenous teachings devoted to raising awareness of social and cultural issues to the non- Indigenous community who could also benefit from a non-Eurocentric Indigenous education curricula. Without these governmental supports, Indigenous people will continue to experience racial stereotyping, social exclusion, and marginalization in the wider society.
- c. This study recommends that national and provincial governments review the funding process for Indigenous communities and increase core funding measures to cultural programs that have demonstrated success in Indigenous communities.

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