

First Nations Perspectives on Transforming the Status of Culture and Language Schooling

Seth Agbo

One of the challenges facing Aboriginal education is how to enhance Aboriginal students' achievement through culturally responsive pedagogies. The issue involved is not merely that of methods of teaching and learning but of acquiring the necessary tools for shaping and implementing a socially and culturally oriented curriculum that recognizes Aboriginal local resources in context and reinforces and maximizes their use in education to make school learning an integral component of the social and cultural context of Aboriginal children's heritage. This paper is about First Nations' perspectives, opinions and attitudes about the status of language and culture in schooling and their suggested strategies to revitalize and preserve First Nations cultures. The paper concludes that the issue involved is not merely one of cultural education of students but also of helping Euro-Canadian teachers to attain the necessary cultural tools for determining and putting into practice a socially and culturally oriented program.

Introduction

In contemporary times, there is increasing recognition of the role of culture in Aboriginal education (Agbo, 2001; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Lipka, Mohatt & the Ciulistet Group, 1998). While studies of Aboriginal education have focused mainly on raising academic standards of students, the wide array of community resources needed for raising the standards has only now begun to draw attention of researchers (Agbo, 2001). This is not merely an oversight by researchers, but results from the emphasis the schooling system places on Euro-centered education (Darder, 1991; Giroux, 1988; Rosaldo, 1993). Recently in 1998, Jerry Lipka, Gerald Mohatt and the Ciulistet Group introduced a book titled *Transforming the Culture of Schools: Yup'ik Eskimo Examples*. They noted apparent ways by which Aboriginal communities can create "culturally responsive education that fundamentally changes the role and relationships between teachers and schooling—and between the community and schooling" (p. 3). According to Lipka et al., "The important role of the community and its elders in indigenous

contexts is an aspect of the culture of school that is central in transforming the framework of schooling to become more inclusive and democratic” (p. 5).

The purpose of this study was to examine community perspectives, opinions, and attitudes about issues concerning First Nations’ language and culture in the local school and how the community people would like to involve and mobilize themselves for action on issues concerning language and cultural education of their children and Euro-Canadian teachers of the community school.

In the past, most theories about indigenous people’s education assumed that ethnic minority people did not succeed in school because they were “culturally deprived.” As Pai and Adler (2001) wrote, “Although it is absurd to speak of a culturally deprived child as if there could be a child without any culture, this notion was used in the 1960s and 1970s to describe many minority children for whom compensatory education was designed” (p. 22). Similarly, Nieto (1996) argued that “cultural deprivation, which in reality means some people do not share in the culture of the dominant group, came to mean that a group was deprived of culture altogether. This is, of course, is nonsense” (p. 138).

Traditional anthropological discourse views culture as beliefs and values, prototypes of knowledge, morals, attitudes, skills, behaviors as well as artistic expressions, accumulated, preserved by a group of people and transmitted from generation to generation (Pai & Adler, 2001). According to Giroux (1988), “There is no attempt in this view to understand culture as shared and lived principles of life, characteristic of different groups and classes as these emerge within asymmetrical relations of power and fields of struggle” (p. 97). In critical literature, culture is dynamic, embodied in a set of power relations, mediated and contested by different groups of people in society. The roots of critical thought about culture are various, stemming intellectually from the work of individuals like Darder (1991), Freire (1970; 1981), Giroux (1994), McLaren (2003) Rosaldo (1993) and others who have in recent years established the interaction between power and culture and demonstrated the importance of considering culture in relation to power in various forms. These individuals examined the social, political, and economic implications of culture to the point of using culture as a perspective from which to examine societal power. According to McLaren (2003), “The ability of individuals to express their culture is related to the power which certain groups are able to wield in the social order” (p. 200).

So, the critical theorist’s school has viewed culture essentially as “the representation of lived experiences, material artifacts, and practices forged within the unequal and dialectical relations that different groups establish in a given society at a particular historical point” (Giroux, 1988, p. 116). In Giroux’s view, in one category, the components of culture constitute a hierarchy of power and social relations that may be read in terms of class, age gender and race. As Giroux wrote, “Culture is a form of production whose processes are intimately connected with the structuring of different social formations, particularly those that are gender, age, racial, and class related” (p. 116). In another category, Giroux viewed culture as “a form of production that helps

human agents, through their use of language and other material sources, to transform society” (pp. 166-117).

For Rosaldo (1993), culture is everywhere, dynamic, and all-inclusive and that one cannot speak of a culturally deprived person. According to Rosaldo, culture “refers broadly to the forms through which people make sense of their lives. . . . Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime. Neither high nor low, culture is all-pervasive” (p. 26).

Similarly in her book, *Culture and Power in the Classroom: A Critical Foundation for Bicultural Education*, Antonia Darder (1991) argued that because of the historical definition of culture in Western anthropological worldview “educators have most often been involved with definitions of culture derived from scientific rationality that is individualistic, apolitical, ahistorical, and based on positivist notion of value-free inquiry and interpretation” (p. 26). The Western view so powerfully shapes our understanding of culture that we overlook conceptions about the proper relationships between culture and power and how they affect learning. For Darder, culture is “a dialectical instance of power and conflict that results from the constant struggle over material conditions and the form and content of everyday life” (p. 29). That is why it is important to treat culture and power together in the dynamic symbiotic relationship in which they in fact co-exist.

In *Teachers as Intellectuals: Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Learning*, Giroux (1988) argued that the separation of culture from power relations does not allow us to educate students “to the ways in which different groups struggle within relations of power and domination as these are played out in the larger social arena” (p. 96). In Giroux’s view, “There is no one culture in the homogeneous sense. On the contrary, there are dominant and subordinate cultures that express different interests and operate from different and unequal terrains of power” (p. 117). To understand the enormous influence that culture exerts on students and teachers in terms of power relations, Giroux (1988) used the term “culture” to signify distinctive ways in which a social group lives out and makes sense of its ‘given’ circumstances and conditions of life” (p. 132).

Hegemony, Cultural Invasion, and Language Domination

There is increasing recognition among critical educational theorists of the relationships among hegemony, cultural invasion, and language domination in schools (Darder, 1991; Giroux, 1988; McLaren, 2003; Rosaldo, 1993). If there is one problem area where First Nations share the greatest common experiences, it is the aspect in which Euro-Canada is able to exercise domination over First Nations through a process known as hegemony. McLaren (2003) defined hegemony as “the struggle in which the powerful win the consent of those who are oppressed, with the oppressed unknowingly participating in their own oppression” (p. 203). The moral and intellectual leadership of Euro-Canadians over First Nations exercised through the school, the church, the media, and the

political system actively restructures the culture and experiences of First Nations. As McLaren (2003) wrote, “Hegemony is not a process of active domination as much as an ethical, political and economic active structuring of the culture and experiences of the subordinate class of the dominant class” (p. 203).

Cultural theorist, Antonia Darder (1991) argues that the processes she calls cultural invasion and language domination both shape and reflect the quality of minority groups’ education in the United States. According to Darder, “Cultural invasion represents an antidialogical action that serves in the sustained social, political and economic oppression of subordinate groups” (p. 36). Darder asserted that language domination is manifested through two processes: minority languages are increasingly rejected by schools in favor of English by teaching students beliefs and values that perpetuate the inferiority of minority languages and, learning styles supporting ideological interests of the dominant groups keep minority students from critical literacy and reduce them to subordination. Darder believes that cultural invasion occurs in circumstances where “many bicultural students are forced to contend with institutional negation and disrespect for their linguistic codes” (p.37). Darder argues that in many schools bicultural students are discouraged and prevented from speaking their native languages with the justification that the native languages will interfere with student academic achievement.

Similarly, speaking to relations of domination, Giroux (1994) describe Western culture as “a one-dimensional Eurocentric academic canon, the autonomous subject as the sovereign source of truth, and forms of high culture which maintain sexist, racist, homophobic, and class-specific relations of domination” (p. 30). Giroux (1988) argued that the linkage between language and power in schools is important because language is fundamental in constructing experiences and subjectivity of students. According to Giroux, “Language intersects with power in the way particular linguistic forms structure and legitimate the ideologies of specific groups” (p. 169), and as a power relation, “language functions to both position and constitute the way that teachers and students define, mediate, and understand their relations to each other and the larger society” (p. 169).

The interesting conjecture common to all of the several recent theories of Indigenous peoples’ education is that the traditional forms of education—mainly formal, bequeathed to indigenous peoples by the dominant European cultures hold little hope for indigenous people. The point being made is that unless educators begin to support the interests and values of indigenous groups and validate indigenous knowledge forms and experiences, the education of indigenous groups would continue to be mediocre in quality. Battiste and Henderson (2000) reiterate the need for Aboriginal education to foster a sense of respect for ethnic and cultural knowledge while also recognizing and building on the distinct features of the various elements that constitute the school curriculum. In his now famous report, Hawthorn (1967) asserts that Aboriginal children do not succeed in school because the rich experiences they acquire in their own culture and language do

not prepare them for the boring routines and activities of school. Teachers of Aboriginal students fail to adequately attend to the needs of the children. Speaking to the inadequacy of the Euro-Canadian teacher to attend to the needs of First Nations children, the Canadian Education Association (CEA) Report (1984) indicates an almost classic failure. As the report states:

Too often, non-native teachers have little or no professional understanding of the lifestyles, values and cultures of native people. There is no doubt that native education must recognize and respect these differences and obviously native teachers and counselors are ideally suited to meet the needs of the native student. However, the need for native teachers is only partially being met and it is the non-native teachers, often ill-prepared to deal with the cultural and linguistic differences, who are responsible for providing the greatest share of native children's education. (p. 75)

Hampton (1995) argued that Aboriginal control of education is meaningless unless it is linked with the control of the structures, methods, and school faculty. He viewed the main problem facing First Nations education as lack of a theory of First Nations education. He maintained there is a need to build a comprehensive theory; that is, establishing a body of knowledge that can legitimately be called a theory of First Nations education. Paquette (1986) contended that, except in a few cases, the curriculum of the First Nations schools does not respond to the realities of the community. He asserts that most First Nations schools tend to "to teach provincially mandated curricula without systematic modification to recognize the cultural and linguistic milieu students come from" (p. 45). Because the majority of teachers of First Nations children are non-Aboriginal origin (Agbo, 1990), it becomes impossible for teachers to adopt a functional approach to a culturally responsive education. Even for teachers of Aboriginal origin, Western education has historically created some definite new class formations of teachers that stand at the margins between Western worldview and First Nations worldview (McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998; Lipka et al., 1998).

Darder (1991) calls for an intellectual retooling of indigenous students. She describes the condition of an all-inclusive learning process involved in preparing indigenous students to develop a kaleidoscopic view of the world while they retain a full grasp of a critical theoretical perspective that views power and culture as intimately linked with education. In short, she sees the need for schools to create the situation for indigenous students to "develop the courage to question the structures of domination that control their lives" (p. 96).

There has been considerable research done on the education of First Nations children. But these studies are susceptible to explanation through Euro-Canadian theoretical frameworks, and have excessively relied on research that analyzes hypotheses that are irrelevant to the First Nations situation. The purpose of this study was to examine community perspectives, opinions and attitudes about issues concerning First Nations language and culture in the local school and how the community people would like to involve and mobilize themselves

for action on issues concerning language and cultural education of their children and Euro-Canadian teachers of the community school. This paper documents First Nations perspectives on the status of culture and language in the schooling of First Nations and how education could become harmonious and less disruptive to traditional culture. The paper also documents recommended strategies of social and cultural orientation of Euro-Canadian teachers as essentially a method of helping them to develop a cultural foundation on which they can alter the content of their teaching. The paper addresses four specific questions pertaining to Aboriginal language and culture in First Nations education: 1) What is the status of First Nations language and traditions in the present-day reservation? 2) What is the status of Aboriginal language and culture in First Nations education? 3) How can non-Aboriginal teachers be culturally prepared to teach First Nations students? 4) What priorities do First Nations living on a reservation suggest for developing language and culture in the school?

Methodology

The research design for this study drew on participatory research, an alternative qualitative research approach to social science and educational research and what Thies (1987) calls “a mode of ongoing participation of Aboriginal people” (p. 8) and “a method of research-in-dialogue with communities” (p. 8). According to Park (1993), the main goal of participatory research “is to bring about a more just society in which no groups or classes suffer from the deprivation of life’s essentials, such as food, clothing, shelter and health, and in which all enjoy basic human freedoms and dignity” (p. 2). Cultural theorists and researchers of ethnic groups have found participatory research as an important way of helping “the downtrodden be self-reliant, self-assertive, and self-determinative, as well as self-sufficient” (Park, 1993, p. 2).

The objective of this study was to collectively identify issues concerning culture and language and to suggest solutions for school improvement. By utilizing participatory research, we engaged data collection processes that combined the activities of research, education, and action (Hall, 1981, Kemmis, 1991; Maguire, 1987; Park, 1993). As an educational process, we engaged in collaborative discussion and interactions that educated us about issues concerning language and culture in the school curriculum. As an action process, we employed collaborative action by suggesting solutions for problems and acting on them.

Profile of the Research Community and School

Blue Pond is a small isolated First Nations fly-in reserve in the Sioux Lookout District of Northwestern Ontario in Canada. Reached only by daily scheduled flights when the weather permits or by a winter road during February and March, Blue Pond is one of over 20 small First Nations communities in the Sioux Lookout District. The community relies on the metropolitan centers of Thunder Bay and Winnipeg that are each of about 700 kilometers away, for its essential supplies of commodities.

The population of the community has grown rapidly from about 400 in 1986 to about 600 in 1995. The Blue Pond population lives in 85 households with an average of about 7 occupants per household. Unlike the general trend of an ageing population in Canada, the population of Blue Pond is young with about 55 % under 20 and about 25% in school in the community.

Unemployment is relatively high in the community. Most of the full time employment is at the Band Office, the School, the Northern Store, and the Nursing Station, with a few more positions becoming available with road, electrical, airstrip, water and sewerage, and telephone services. In 1995, there were 74 full-time employees in Blue Pond. The only non-First Nations residents of the community are teachers, nurses, and Northern Store workers and manager.

In 1988 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) handed the school over to band control. At present, the Blue Pond School is a K-8 school. The staff comprises twelve members and a custodian. Like most First Nations communities in Northern Ontario, 95 percent of teachers were of Euro-Canadian descent (Agbo, 1990). The principal who is directly responsible to an education coordinator is highest authority at the in-school level. The education coordinator is in turn responsible to a Local Education Authority (LEA) and the community at large. The LEA is made up of five members and a chairperson. There is a band council member in charge of education, who is responsible to the Chief and Council of the Band.

The school, housed in six classrooms, two of which are in portables, is an assortment of permanent facilities and prefabricated classrooms with a community center attached to the main school building. Built in 1989, the center houses a gymnasium that the school uses for purposes of physical education and assembly.

As well as educating community children, the school is important as a major employer of community people and also acts as an important political symbol, in that the Chief and Band Council could close down the school in demand for certain amenities from the federal government.

Research Procedures

The most important aspects of participatory research are 1) the origins of the issues, 2) the functions which those concerned with the issues play in the process, 3) the concentration of the strategy in the context of the moment, 4) the understanding of power relationships, 5) the prospect for organizing for collective learning, and 6) the production of knowledge that is linked to action (Hall, 1981; Agbo, 2001). This study was intended to be practical and useful to community people in a way to enable them to seek their own ways of improving their school system as they determined the order of priority in which they held educational issues and sought ideas and suggestions for change. The Participatory Research Network (1982) documents various approaches to participatory research. These include group discussions, interviews, public meetings, research teams, open-ended surveys, community seminars, fact-finding tours, collective production of audiovisual materials, theatre, education camps, and many more. For the purpose

of this paper, I drew on data collected mainly through informal interviews and group discussion workshops.

Interviews

Fifty-eight community members comprising band workers, LEA members, parents, and students were interviewed for this study. The interviews were conducted in English for those that could understand and speak English and in Ojibwe for those who could not speak English. Each interview lasted from 45 minutes to one hour. Because of the cross-cultural nature of the research, I had to employ an Ojibwe interpreter to translate the answers of people who could not respond to the interview questions in English.

The interview was semi-structured with open-ended questions to allow participants to express their unique views about schooling. I focused on basic questions such as:

1. How do you view the status of First Nations traditions and language in the community?
2. What role do you think First Nations culture should play in the curriculum of the school?
3. Why would you, or would you not, advocate the teaching of the First Nations language and culture in the school?
4. What role would you like teachers to play in promoting First Nations culture?
5. What should we do to help non-Aboriginal teachers to fit into the community and teach the children effectively?

I visited homes and offices with the Ojibwe interpreter to conduct the interviews. I took field notes and tape-recorded all the interviews. For the field notes, I made detailed descriptions of the dialogue I had with respondents, the events, the physical settings and the demographic information of respondents (Creswell, 1994). I also recorded reflective notes that captured the non-verbal cues that I gathered from the responses (Creswell, 1994). The tapes were transcribed verbatim as soon after the interviews as possible. The interview process allowed me to explore areas of unique participant concern or importance that I might not initially have anticipated, as well as areas of concern common to all participants. Throughout the interview and transcription process, I highlighted responses that appeared either especially relevant or that were similar to other responses (Miles and Huberman, 1994). I also reviewed those responses that were different from others but had particular intensity or relevance to specific issues.

As this study involves the mobilization of community people to pose problems and find solutions to them, the interview process was flexible to accommodate all the necessary viewpoints of participants. I based the process on Freire's (1970) concepts of dialogue and problem posing. Freire (1970) argues that "Without dialogue, there is no communication and without communication,

there can be no true education” (p. 81). Thus, in Freire’s terms, dialogue encourages critical thinking and action. So, in the present study, dialogue with individuals and groups meant a process of developing conversation with First Nations people, respecting their ways of knowing, their ways of working, and thinking about reality.

Group Discussion Workshops

According to the Participatory Research Network (1982), “Group discussions are probably the most widely used method in participatory research. They occur throughout the process, and are often used together with other methods” (p. 6). The Participatory Research Network (1982) suggests small numbers of eight, 12 or 25 who meet to solve problems by sharing experiences, information and support. This study targeted the small group of five people who form the LEA and three others from the Band Council who were active on school affairs, to act as an advisory or reference group for the project. Basically, this group advised on what to do in the course of the project. Participants were encouraged to present and talk about their own ideas especially about what changes they required for the school in the community.

The data for this study come mostly from interviews and two workshops. An invitation was extended to as many as 45 people to attend the first workshop but only 28 participants attended. These people were composed of the school teaching and support staff, the LEA members, and some community people. During the second workshop, 32 people participated. These people included 26 of those who attended the first workshop and 6 others who joined from the community. The purpose of the workshops was to pose problems, identify causes, discuss possible solutions, and evaluate actions (Participatory Research Network, 1982). The themes of the workshops reflected the perspectives of participants in relation to the status of culture and language in the community and school.

During each of the workshops, there were 3 groups with an average of 10 people in each group. A group was made up of teachers, parents and band council workers, who constituted a research team that worked together with a teacher as secretary. The group worked on one of three themes (research questions) of the study. For example, the first group identified problems associated with the status of Aboriginal language and culture in the school; the second group discussed how non-Aboriginal teachers could be culturally prepared to teach First Nations students; and the third group worked on priorities for developing language and culture in the school. At the workshops, the groups discussed problems and strategies for their solution. I acted as facilitator and joined in various group discussions. After we spent the whole morning discussing issues in groups, we broke up for lunch and came back in the afternoon to discuss group results in a plenary session. At these sessions, group secretaries presented their reports for comments.

The group discussions generated conditions under which people felt comfortable and free to speak. We used the group discussions to build a sense

of trust, support and cooperation as a group of people who shared the same ideas or problems. Our discussions allowed us to sustain communication among us and also acted as productive interviews (Participatory Research Network 1982). The arrangement seemed to work very effectively as participants indicated that they found the exercise very interesting. Sometimes, disagreements that resulted in arguments made it necessary for participants to take votes on issues. If participants agreed, the general secretary documented the discussions and tape-recorded them to ensure that important remarks were not overlooked. After the discussions, I produced a summary report that I distributed to all participants for their perusal and feedback. At times, participants drew my attention to issues not in the report.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this study utilized qualitative procedures with a focus on generating meaning within a particular setting (Lather, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1994). I analyzed the data continuously from the beginning of the research although I did most of the analysis after I had collected all the data. That is to say, I continuously referred to, and reflected on the data being collected and compiled some systematic field notes that might be useful to the study. The analysis entailed classifications, the formation and testing of ideas, making connections among ideas, and relating concepts to emerging categories.

For the interviews, I first listened to each audiotape and made detailed notes or transcription of the interviewees' responses. I then subjected each of the responses to a coding system I developed to identify the respondent and the interview questions to which she/he responded. I separated each of the respondents/responses using as guidelines the research questions for the study. The objective was to categorize each of the responses according to common patterns, themes or ideas that fit into the research questions. Because I had to employ an interpreter to translate the answers of community people who could not answer the interview questions in English, there may be a possibility for misinterpretation. It was in order to minimize this possibility that I subjected the tape recordings in Ojibwe to a second interpretation. In all cases, the second interpreter confirmed the translation of the first one.

Furthermore, to prevent incidents of single, possibly well-articulated or emphatic views of individual respondents from outshining the others, I counted the number of respondents who expressed a certain view or theme relating to a concept. Rather than considering the majority view of total respondents, the unit of analysis was each of the groups I invited to participate in the research. I considered groups such as the advisory committee, band workers, community elders, parents, teachers, and students as levels of analysis. I then searched for patterns, repeated themes or views that conformed to categories such as status of language and traditions in the community, teacher orientation, language and cultural instruction, and suggested priorities. To view a perception as a factor, a majority of participants belonging to each of the groups would have had to refer to it as an issue, and, therefore, deserving to be considered in the analysis and

presentation of the results of this study. Thus, data analysis essentially involved coding and counting the data according to the categorized indicators and highlighting further indicators that became evident from the raw data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

There were three main perspectives that emerged from this study: (a) status of First Nations language and traditions on the reservation; (b) the status of language and culture in the school; and (c) cultural education of community teachers. The first, status of First Nations language and traditions on the reservation has to do with community perceptions about the level of community vocabulary, logic, morals, values and standards on the reservation. The second, the status of language and culture in the school describes community perceptions about the importance of local culture, language and traditions in the education of community children. The third, cultural education of community teachers concerns community perceptions and suggestions about how to culturally integrate Euro-Canadian teachers into community life. In what follows I present the results of First Nations perspectives on transforming the status of culture and language in the school.

Status of First Nations Language and Traditions on the Reservation

In regards to the status of traditions in the present-day community, participants observed a disintegration of traditional values in the community. Many elders believed that the disintegration of traditional beliefs causes lack of identity and self esteem in young people. Therefore, in order for children to develop self-esteem, they need to identify themselves with traditional values of First Nations. This study revealed that community elders are aware of a myriad of First Nations traditional ways of life—traditional recreational activities, traditional ways of healing, and many ways in which to live a healthy and happy life. Participants said that children should have the chance of learning from elders those traditional values that may be relevant to their well-being. I found interest, patronage, and pride in the comments of an 87-year old woman regarding some facets of First Nations life in the years before the advent of schooling

When I was a young girl, people had respect for one another. People helped each other and families that had enough food helped others that did not have. When the head person of the family was sick other people would hunt for the sick person's family. When people go hunting, everybody should know where they were going so that when they were lost, we would go look for them. If anybody had a problem, the whole extended family sat down to talk about it and discussed ways of solving it. Marriage problems were settled by husbands' and wives' families until they came to a consensus. There were never broken marriages in those days. (Interview with community elder, Blue Pond)

Some elders indicated that the close affinity that kept the people of Blue Pond together, and which made them a common extended family is giving way

to individualism among younger families. Families have started shrinking into the nuclear family system and parents do not educate children about the relationships in the community. As the elderly woman put it,

Today, parents do not educate their children about their relations. Children shouldn't forget that they have uncles, aunts, grandfathers, and grandmothers. [Not until recently] did one of my grandsons next door didn't know that I was his father's mother. Although he calls me 'kokom' [grandmother] he didn't know I was his father's mother. That is not good. Parents don't communicate much with their children. (Interview with community elder, Blue Pond)

Some young people have confirmed the loss of their tradition, particularly language. I heard M.C. in his early 40s complaining about the loss of the traditional form of speaking. As the man stated,

Sometimes I find it difficult to know the exact Ojibwe words to use when I describe things. I've noticed that most young people mix English with Ojibwe when talking. Sometimes I wonder if our elders understand when we talk to them. The English language contains words that we can't use traditionally. But these words are very common with the younger people. Our language doesn't have swear words, but nowadays most of us use these words very frequently.

The social pattern of traditional First Nations society today seems to be undergoing serious change. The ideals that are taken for granted by elders, such as kinship, respect for elders, and helping, for example, are not observed by younger members of the society. Some community members believed that social change had created problems ill-suited to life in the community. As a noted Band worker observed,

The younger generation no longer respects anything. All that they're interested in is their rock and roll music, drinking and sniffing gas. I guess they're only interested in what they see happening on the TV. (Interview with Band worker)

Some were troubled by the existence of irreducible residue of Euro-Canadian youth culture among the younger generation. Many parents have blamed the advent of television in the community for the continuing demise of First Nations traditional values. Parents have reported that their children have become more aggressive than when they themselves were growing up as children. They feel that children no longer listen to parents and teachers. As elder W. S. stated,

Children of today are different from us. We listened to our parents and teachers and respected their opinions. Nowadays, children don't listen to anybody. They do what they want to do. They're aggressive towards each other and don't care about any consequences for misbehavior. I don't know if it's because of the television they watch. As soon as the television came into this community, the children have become different. We have to do something about it otherwise we will produce a next generation that is irresponsible (Interview with a community elder)

There was a call for the establishment of a high school in the community because community people indicated that the most urgent and intractable issues of schooling of teenagers outside the community were those of alcohol and drug abuse. One parent expressed her concern:

There should be a high school in the community because when we send the kids away to high school, they're not able to cope with the situation out there. They acquire the habit of drinking and doing drugs. This' a dry reserve [meaning, no alcohol allowed] and our students must learn to stay dry when they're in school. As soon as they go out there, they're free to go drinking. I approached the Band Office that they should put a grade 9 program in the community but they haven't done that up till now.

A ninth grade program has been established in the community following the recommendations of this study.

The Status of Language and Culture in a Community School

In the discussions I had with community people and teachers, it was evident that the majority of community people perceived the importance of local culture, language, and tradition in the education of the children. However, the people were divided in their opinions as to whether it is important for the language and culture of First Nations to form an integral part of the school curriculum. Teachers, particularly, felt that culture and tradition, including the language should form an integral part of the school program. As a 32-year old Euro-Canadian male teacher, H. D. stated,

Education should help Native children to learn about, and survive in their community as well as the larger society. This' also true for any child in any culture. Education can give children thinking and analytical skills that they can use to pass on their own culture to their children and people. In this changing Native culture, education is vital to help children learn skills that will be necessary to cope adequately with change. It will also provide them with skills to use if they choose to live in a non-Native community. (Interview with a Euro-Canadian teacher)

There were two divisions in opinions regarding the teaching of First Nations language and culture in the school. The first group was those who opposed the teaching of the language, culture, and traditions. This group comprised people who believed that teaching of language and traditions constitutes a waste of students' time because children learn the language as they speak it at home. The views of a 43-year old man, K. E., were generally representative of those who think that teaching the language is a waste of time:

Parents speak the language to the students at home and I don't think it's important that the school wastes time on teaching First Nations language. The kids need to know how to speak and write English. Their language is going down. When I was in school, I learned English. We were not allowed to speak our language at school. Nobody spoke the language to me when I was way out in school. I only spoke the language when I visited my parents

once a while, but I haven't forgotten it, I speak to my children at home.
(Interview with a Band worker, Blue Pond)

Similarly, some elderly people who attended residential schools in the old days view the school as a place to acquire literacy and numeral skills rather than traditional values. The view expressed by W. S., a 73 year-old man who attended a residential school in the 1920s and 1930s, is not symbolic of other views expressed by elders who never attended school. When I asked W. S. whether it was important to teach First Nations language, traditions, and culture in the school, he acknowledged the teaching of culture, but not the First Nations language. According to him, children already speak the language in the community and need to acquire proficiency in English for them to survive outside the community. He stated,

When I went to school at [name of school], the teachers didn't teach us Indian language but we never forgot to speak it. They taught us arithmetic, reading, and writing. That is what the kids should learn at school. Learning the Indian Language is not important. It is important for them to spend more time on English. A lot of people would like to know how to read, write, and speak English. Cultural program is important [he scratches his beard]. I think it is important. It is also good to teach them about motors. Let them take the motors apart and learn about them.

W.S. implied that the language of a people is not merely one of academic knowledge but is a reflection of human experience, accumulated, preserved, and passed on through various modes from generation to generation. Also, the perceptions of W. S. represented his concern about a generation that would be able to take machines apart and repair them. This concern suggests a viable message about the changing nature of the culture in Blue Pond.

While the study suggests that some people see the relevance of children acquiring proficiency in the three Rs above everything else, some others, particularly elderly people who never went to school, generally felt that the language, traditions, and culture are important in the education of the children. The views of the majority of elderly respondents in regard to cultural education appear to suggest that the education system should be able to espouse traditional values and at the same time meet the changes taking place in society. As J. S., a 66-year old parent put it when asked about the status of culture in the school,

When we were kids, we used to go hunting with dogsleds in winter and summer time we use canoes on the lake. But now we use skidoos and outboards. I remember how my father used to teach me how to get the dogs prepared for the trap-line. In my father's days, they used bows and arrows and every child should know how to make them but nowadays we no longer use those things. I guess the children should learn how to handle guns properly. Oh, yes, they should know how to repair snowmobiles, outboards, things like that so that you don't get stranded in the middle of the forest.
(Interview with community elder)

As snowmobiles have replaced dog sleds, and boats with outboard motors have replaced canoes in most First Nations communities, including Blue Pond, respondents see the need for people in the community who are able to repair these machines. Almost every household in Blue Pond owns a snowmobile and a boat with an outboard motor. As there are no people in the community capable of taking these machines apart and putting them back together, many people abandon their machines as soon as they start to give problems. Respondents feel the school should be responsible for teaching children the skills needed to repair these machines.

The School as a Clearinghouse for Culture

Although there were divisions in opinions about teaching the First Nations language, it seems that on the whole, the majority of community people and teachers would like the contemporary school to become a clearinghouse for community traditions and culture. Evidence collected as field notes at a meeting that the LEA and the staff attended and interview data I present below clearly suggest the importance of the school becoming a clearinghouse for community culture:

At today's staff meeting the staff and LEA members agreed that the school should regularly invite elders to come in to tell stories about old times. The children should document these stories as a form of newsletter for the community. The older children should be made by their teachers to collect pieces of information from the very elderly people and compile these pieces of information into a book that will contain traditions and culture of the past. Teacher H.D. agreed to coordinate the information gathering activity. (Field Notes: February 17)

Like the LEA and the school staff, a 38-year old woman, B. K., offered her opinion:

Why won't the school organize a cultural day and invite everybody in the community to bring something that has to do with our culture--a kind of cultural fair. You can ask G. M. [actual name deleted] to teach students beadwork, and W. G. [actual name deleted] to teach them First Nations art. They will bring all these things and then we will find the best, perhaps first, second, and third prizes and then give them something for the prizes. I think this' kind of neat. It'll make people see different kinds of things about our culture. I think the school should be doing this kind of thing.

Some respondents expressed some rather totally different interesting views about the status of culture in the school. One of these views was expressed by 43-year old J. M. who attended a residential school:

I went to school far away from my community and I lost contact with my parents, sisters, and brothers. I remember that for a long time, I could not visit home and when I returned, I saw my sisters and brothers had grown older. It kind of kept me away from my family and up till now, we are not as close as we were before we all went to school. I lost my culture. Now our kids will be together at least up to grade 8 before going out for grade 9.

Actually, we have to bring in grade 9 before too late. As soon as you go out, you lose your culture

I find the above point interesting because some people felt that the very existence of the school in the community is a means of cultural preservation. Many people acknowledged the view held by J. M. that attending school outside the community deprived children of some part of their culture. They felt that the presence of the school in the community allows parents to be with their children for a longer period of time than they would have been with them if the children were to go out to attend residential schools. Parents, therefore, indicated that being with their children is in itself a way of preserving their culture.

Another interesting point revealed by an elderly man was that in the past parents did not want to send their children to school outside the community for fear that they would lose the children to the outside world. As 73 year-old, W. S. stated,

Parents did not want to send their kids to school because they were afraid that they'd never come back. Sometimes they'll go with them to the trap-line so that the authorities won't see them. Anyone who put children in school was given welfare support and didn't have to go trapping. It was only when this welfare thing came that parents started sending their kids out.

This respondent further hinted that in effect the welfare scheme received support from many parents who were compelled to send their children to school. What he felt was significant, however, was that once children went to school, they were separated from their parents and siblings by schools, missions, and welfare authorities, and these authorities did everything to estrange them from their traditions and culture.

The loss of the First Nations language, traditions, and culture are of great concern to a majority of the elderly people in Blue Pond. The elders I interviewed during the study indicated a sublime respect for their language and traditions and were disturbed about the possibility that the present generation of school children may lose their language entirely. One elder, W. C. (63 years old and never attended the White-man's school), remarked:

It's very important to teach the Indian language in the school. The children should be able to write syllabics [First Nations alphabet]. If they're not taught syllabics, how will they keep their culture? How will they write newspapers in syllabics for the elders to read? Elders like reading that sort of thing. Young people these days are losing that skill. They can't write syllabics. It is the Indian people's curriculum, you know. (Interview with a community elder)

The fear W. C. has about the loss of First Nations language and culture is also evident among some members of the younger generation. K. D., a 36-year old parent and Band Office clerk who attended school outside the community had perceptions that were typical of educated community people of similar age. He considered the purpose of education in the community as a means of cultural preservation:

The purpose of education in this community should be for the preservation of our culture. I would like to see programs of First Nations culture. First Nations language should be taught and teachers should teach First Nations history and culture. I was taught the Bible and to believe in God, but I would like children to be taught the culture of our people. Teachers must have the knowledge of First Nations ancestry, how governments have influenced and affected First Nations people and their children.

Language and Culture Program. At the time of this study, the school in Blue Pond did not teach First Nations language and a cultural program since 1988, the year the school was taken over by the band authorities. In order to further examine the attitudes and viewpoints of community people and teachers on the language and culture issue, I asked the question: "Would you explain why you would like (or not like) your child/student to learn First Nations language at school?" While all the teachers and a majority of parents acknowledged that they would like their students/children to learn First Nations language and culture, a few parents felt that since their children speak First Nations language at home, they would rather like them to use the time that would be spent on First Nations language to improve their skills in English language. This line of thinking seems logical in that as the present-day Blue Pond society has become so thoroughly dependent on the Euro-Canadian economy cutting down the time for learning mainstream subjects would be unthinkable.

Because some interview respondents indicated that they were concerned about the lack of First Nations language and a cultural program in the school, and others did not see the importance of teaching the First Nations language, the issue became an important focus of discussion in one of the workshops. At the workshop in which we formed discussion groups on the issue, one of the groups felt that the learning of First Nations language might bring the school and the home together. Another group argued persuasively that parents should understand that the teaching of First Nations language at school could be a way of enhancing self-identity of children and that by learning the language at school, children may give the same credence to First Nations language as they give to other school subjects. Although this group's presentation was persuasive, it posed a heated argument for discussion as other participants continued to indicate that the teaching of First Nations language constituted a waste of time and resources.

After several discussions, participants arrived at a consensus that generated two conclusions: (a) First Nations language could enhance children's self-identity and self-esteem if they give the same credibility to their language as to other subjects in the curriculum; and (b) children will come to give more respect to elders in the community who do not speak any other language but the First Nations language. At that workshop, disagreements developed into arguments. In order to reach a consensus, participants had to vote for, or against the teaching of First Nations language in the school. After the vote, researcher and participants (school staff members, the LEA, Band Office personnel, and community people) arrived at the conclusion that it was important to teach First Nations language in

school and that the program should commence during the following fall. We then came out with a blueprint that states:

We find First Nations language important in the school. We feel it would enhance students' pride in their heritage and would also help to bridge the gap between the school and the home. It is essential, therefore, to have First Nations language in the school under the following conditions: (a) there is a qualified First Nations language instructor who could teach both the language and syllabics; (b) we could use one half-hour per day for each class; and (c) the First Nations language teacher would instruct non-First Nations teachers in the basics for one half-hour per week. (Meeting of School Staff, LEA, Band Workers, and Community people, February 15)

However, there was a feeling from participants that there was a problem of finding a qualified person in the community to teach the First Nations language.

Closely related to the problem of language is the implementation of a cultural program in the school. There was almost a unanimous agreement on teaching the culture in school as workshop participants indicated that if there was no cultural program in the school, students might tend to lose their knowledge in the arts and crafts of their heritage and students might also be inadequately prepared to learn the necessary skills for survival in their environment. With respect to a cultural program, we arrived at the following statement:

There is the need for a cultural program for boys and girls from grades 3 to 8 in the school. The school could use Friday afternoons for the students to study the arts, crafts, and survival skills of First Nations people. There would be two components of the program: (a) the in-school program for the study of First Nations art work, needlework and sewing, and First Nations crafts; (b) the out-of-school program for the study of survival skills in the woods. We recommend that the instructors are paid employees of the school and are incorporated fully into the entire life of the school. The cultural program should start in fall. We may encounter possible problems in the implementation of the program, such as, difficulty of finding suitable instructors and budget constraints.

At the workshop, those who opposed the teaching of language and culture in the school acknowledged the importance of the children acquiring both the language and culture. However, they argued that parents were in a better position to teach their children than the non-First Nations teaching staff who were not familiar with the culture. In retrospect, participants acknowledged that the issue involved is not merely one of not wanting their children to learn their language and culture but is one of finding teachers competent enough to shape and implement a cultural- and language-oriented program that can be sustained from within the school.

Respondents also believed that in order to face the two cultures confronting them students need a degree of competence in each of the cultures, an essentially bicultural system of education. When asked what should constitute the core of the curriculum of the school, a 49 year-old parent A. W. commented,

Teachers should teach the children to know that they're Aboriginal people and should be proud of that. We the Aboriginal people know a lot of things

that other people don't know. Our great grandfathers have survived in this part of the world without the White man. Our children should know that we have a culture of survival and that's important. The children should be able to know about different parts of the world and they should know that there's a place beyond Blue Pond. Education for the children should be the Aboriginal education and the White man's education. They should know how to read and write our language and they should also read and write English well.

The comments made above by A. W. are representative of the thinking of most community people. The study indicated that community people deem it important for teachers to strike a happy balance between First Nations and non-First Nations cultures in their teaching. Therefore, in collaboration with Euro-Canadian teachers, community people would like to see the core curriculum to be one that will equip the students with the ability to think and speak, first as First Nations children, and secondly, as mainstream Canadians.

Another community member and Band Office employee, 51-year old K. J. reiterated the importance of a two-way education:

Native language and culture are important, but they're not as important as reading and writing and that computer stuff. Right now, we're looking for people at the Band Office to work using the computer. Yes, that is the kind of stuff teachers should be teaching (Interview with Band worker).

To go beyond parents' viewpoints to those of their children, the study showed that a majority of the children acknowledged the need to learn their culture and language at school. To them, school, as it was then, was a daily boring routine imposed on them by teachers and parents. When asked what she would like to learn at school, O. K., a grade 7 student stated,

I'll like to learn how to make moccasins and good beadwork. School's boring! I want to quit [She laughed]. I'm just kidding. (Interview with student)

Similarly, B. V., a sixth grade student maintained that school is boring and that he would like to go hunting rather than be at school. He stated he went to school because all his friends attend. As he commented:

I'd like to go hunting but I come to school because everybody else is going and nobody will go hunt birds with me. Sometimes me and John go hunt or fish and we don't come or when I sleep in I can't come, then I wake up am late. My mother sometimes wakes me and I am angry so she doesn't like to wake me.

It is apparent from students' comments that the core ideals that the school curriculum is supposed to promote to engender students' interest in school are absent. The most common reference to why children were regular in the community school centered on the fact that the school acts as one of the only places for the children to socialize in the community and they could not afford to stay at home when others were in school.

Cultural Education of Euro-Canadian Teachers

In contrast to viewpoints that concerned student learning of the community culture and language, the role of teachers in promoting the culture of the community emerged as an area of interest that underscores the primacy of cultural education, orientation, and integration of teachers into the community. Respondents I interviewed felt that some of the demise of community culture could be traced back to the Euro-Canadian teachers of the school. The teachers, who in theory were supposed to impart cultural knowledge, were themselves ignorant of First Nations culture and way of doing things. Participants recommended that the initial necessity was for teachers to become acquainted with the culture of First Nations. It is clear from the present study that community people want to feel that Euro-Canadian teachers are reinforcing family values, that is, respect for parents, elders and First Nations culture rather than teaching children only Western values. I asked 38-year old M. G., a mother of two, what she would recommend for teachers to do to promote the community culture in school. She stated:

Teachers should teach children our values. We were taught to respect our parents but these kids don't want to listen to us as parents. The kids don't respect elders. They just do what they like. I think teachers should teach them things like respect for elders, and our culture too. (Interview with a parent)

Respondents also indicated that in order to communicate effectively with parents, teachers needed to understand the cultural differences, First Nations' way of life, their problems, and aspirations. As B. M. of the Band Office remarked,

Teachers are different from us and they've got the way they do things and we also have our own way of doing things. I know parents won't come to teachers if they don't go to them. Teachers have to show understanding of our way of life and our problems. If teachers invite parents and they come late teachers should understand that they're on First Nations time (laugh). (Interview with Band worker)

Teacher Orientation into Community Life. Teachers felt that the two-day orientation they received in Sioux Lookout before coming into the community was inadequate to prepare them to understand their students and parents. They recommended two types of orientation: one prior to arrival in the community, and one after arrival in the community. The first orientation should be at least one week long and should accomplish the following:

1. It should thoroughly explain differences in culture.
2. It should offer some training for teaching English as a second language.
3. It should provide an information package of the community including pictures and videotapes.
4. Above all, it should spell out teacher expectations.

As teacher H.S. simply put it:

The orientation prior to arriving in the community should include suggestions as to how to 'break the ice' with the local people, what the community views as the role of the teachers both in and outside of the school environment; the duties and responsibilities of the Education coordinator and the LEA; administrative procedures/paper-work and brief synopsis of the Windigo Education Policy (Interview with Euro-Canadian teacher)

Teachers indicated that the orientation after they arrive in the community should be ongoing. They said they could use the first few days to familiarize themselves with community people and the environment. Teacher M. C. stated,

Once in the community the teachers could be taken on a walking tour of the place, to familiarize themselves with the layout; they could be introduced to the families. This could be done in one morning or afternoon. The potluck dinner this year was a good idea. It would be nice to have someone tutor the teachers for about half an hour once a week in Ojibwe, so we could learn some common greetings, expressions and phrases. (Interview with Euro-Canadian teacher)

Some teachers also indicated that as part of the orientation process in the community, it is necessary for Euro-Canadian teachers and community people to discuss issues directly pertaining to the education of the children. Teacher S. D. remarked,

The orientation in the community should include a discussion of the local goals of education; an introduction to local resource people for cultural activities, traditional values, and those willing to assist in the classroom and extra-curricular activities when needed; a list of community activities in which teachers could participate; and a list of band officials and their responsibilities, and an introduction to these people. (Interview with Euro-Canadian teacher)

Mentor Families. Teachers expressed the need to have mentor families to prepare them for some aspects of community lifestyles, such as hunting, fishing, cooking and craftwork. These volunteer families could "adopt" teachers and bring them up to know the First Nations way. As teacher H. D stated,

If possible, various families in the community could volunteer to adopt a teacher and invite them to go hunting, fishing, trapping and participate in their everyday life--hauling water, getting wood, and eating with the family. The teachers would gain valuable information and understanding of local life that would benefit them in teaching their children. This adoption would create a better rapport between the parents and the teachers and would promote cooperation. Teachers would be made to feel welcome in the community and would feel as if they were part of the community. A great benefit to the teachers would be first-hand experience/assimilation into the local way of life. (Interview with Euro-Canadian teacher)

When I asked teachers about how much they thought they should know about First Nations before teaching their children, almost all of them agreed that it is important for them to understand the social and cultural realities in the community. They also indicated that they needed to have some understanding

of the general learning styles of First Nations children and how they could adapt curriculum and resources to local needs. One of the female teachers, M. C, maintained,

I think it is important to be aware of the realities that exist both socially and culturally in the community. We need to know what kind of behavior is acceptable. Also, we should have an understanding of the general learning styles of Natives. (Interview with Euro-Canadian teacher)

While community people felt that teachers were unwilling to learn about their way of life, teachers, on the other hand, indicated that they were willing to learn all that they could, provided community people were prepared to teach them. A majority of teachers expressed that it is the duty of the community people to find ways and means of imparting their culture to non-Native teachers. Teachers further indicated that as part of its involvement, the community should help teachers to learn the culture, language and history of the local community.

The Role of Universities in Teacher Education. Discussions with the Euro-Canadian teachers revealed that most of them did not know about First Nations and their culture before arriving in the community. Teachers would have preferred to learn about First Nations people and their culture at the university. They felt that the university should play a vital role in improving the quality of teachers for First Nations children. A female teacher, S. D., remarked:

I believe all education programs should include courses on Native studies. Some of these should be taught by Native people, and some taught by non-Natives who have worked with Native students. This would provide teachers with culturally relevant information, as well as information that will help prepare them for what they will face in working in Native communities. (Interview with Euro-Canadian teacher)

Teachers stated that universities should devote research towards collecting material from First Nations communities for use in courses such as in sociology of education and educational psychology. Also, teachers felt that universities should organize seminars and give presentations in classes about First Nations education. H.D, whom I asked how much teachers need to know before teaching First Nations students, put it this way

The focus of knowledge, I think should deal with psychology. How Native children think is crucial to designing approaches to helping them learn and especially for classroom management and discipline. Teachers need to know a lot about children, their relationship with the community and how the community responds to the needs of children not as it was traditionally, but as it is today, or maybe both (Interview with a Euro-Canadian teacher).

When I asked another teacher, D.T., what he thought should be the role of universities in improving the quality of teachers for First Nations children, his response captured the ideas of most of the teachers. He stated,

Being a student with the help of Native organizations and committees, content can be collected and submitted to universities to use in conjunction with sociology and psychology course content; otherwise, faculties of education should hold seminars, have presentations in classes, and hold a Native awareness day or week annually at the universities in order to kindle the interest of student teachers in Native education. (Interview with a Euro-Canadian teacher)

Fundamental Strategies Suggested for Language and Culture in the Community School

A majority of participants at the workshops and respondents to interview questions favored an idea that the community as a whole should adhere to what we termed a cultural revival. Recommendations that emerged from the study are:

1. It is necessary for all people in the community to respect old ways of doing things, especially, First Nations spirituality; there is the need to blend First Nations spirituality with Christianity. Church leaders should understand the importance of respecting traditional spirituality and be willing to pass on First Nations culture to the youth.
2. There is the need to educate people in traditional beliefs and the school should play the part as a clearinghouse to teach traditional ways, for example, through legends, local traditional historical information, technical skills of hunting and trapping, gathering, and preparing traditional food items.
3. The school should invite elders to tell stories about the past and community people should organize spiritual events in which elders would teach the youth.
4. Awareness of respect for the land and environment should be promoted at a particular period of the year during which time people should be taught to avoid waste and respect nature.
5. More First Nations elders knowledgeable in the customs and traditions should be included in schoolwork to teach both teachers and students traditional ways

Specific Implementation Strategies Suggested for Culture and Language Education

Participants suggested that one of the most important ways to address the issue of language and culture education is for the school to start a First Nations language and cultural program for students as follows:

1. Each grade level should have at least one half hour of instruction in First Nations Language each day.

2. The First Nations language teacher should instruct Euro-Canadian and other non-First Nations teachers in the basics of First Nations language at least one half hour each week.
3. The school should devote Friday afternoons to a cultural program for students in grade three through eight to study the arts, crafts and survival skills of First Nations people.
4. The cultural program should comprise two components—(a) an in-school and (b) an out-of-school program. The in-school program should instruct students in First Nations art, needlework, sewing, and crafts. The out-of-school program should instruct students in survival skills in the woods. The instructors should be community people, paid employees, who should fully integrate themselves into the school system.

Finally, the call for teachers to have a more general understanding of the First Nations situation within the reserve and should have access to relevant information about the community before coming to take up their jobs engendered the suggestion of other specific implementation strategies as follows:

1. The Local Education Authority should base teacher recruitment on capability to teach in an isolated, multilingual, bicultural community, where the school population is of a different culture from the mainstream Canadian population.
2. Teachers should take planned courses in First Nations language and culture on the reserve before coming. Such courses must involve First Nations instructors with accurate and pertinent knowledge of the reserve.
3. Teachers should have an orientation when they arrive in the community.
4. Teachers should reach out into the community, talk with people, get to know people and show interest in understanding the traditions of the community.

Discussion

I found a significant level of awareness of past traditions among the elders of Blue Pond. Younger people in general, were not knowledgeable on matters concerning past traditional beliefs, cultural patterns, and expectations of the First Nations people. Nevertheless, data from elderly people strongly confirmed that even though children were raised to speak Ojibwe, there was a comprehensive pool

of information on local traditions that is virtually unknown to the young and the Euro-Canadian teachers who teach the children.

The first group of community people to acquire formal education went to school outside the community in the 1920s. The early years of formal education attempted to replace First Nations traditions with Western ones. Darder's (1991) concept of cultural invasion and language domination states that Western European colonizers "have insisted that colonized children be taught in the European language and who, by way of this process, have attempted to strip away systematically the cultural integrity and independence of the native people they wish to control and dominate" (p. 37). The issue of disagreement on the teaching of First Nations language in school by those who attended residential schools is not surprising because of the "disenfranchising legacy of formal schooling for indigenous groups in the United States, and on the continuing impact of that legacy" (McCarty & Watahomigie, 1998, p. 71). This represents one element of hegemony to which McLaren (2003) referred to "ideological hegemony" (p. 205). McLaren described ideological hegemony as "a way of viewing the world, a complex of ideas, various types of social practices, rituals, and representations *that we tend to accept as natural and as common sense*" [Italics his] (p. 205). In this context, First Nations have increasingly accepted civil identities imposed by the Euro-Canadian system and status identities shaped by class or profession in rejection of the more potent communal bonds of primordial identities shaped by language, ethnicity, and religion. In other words, First Nations families have actively subscribed to the values and objectives of Euro-Canada without being aware of the source of those values or the interests for which they exist.

However, despite the effects of Western education in replacing First Nations traditions, many elders conserve some cache of traditional knowledge. This result supports Anderock's (1992), LeVine & White's (1986), and Thies' (1987) findings that ethnic groups do not easily replace their ethnic cultures with a dominant culture even when they acquire Western education. Ethnic groups may often stick to their traditional objectives even if they seemingly accept status identities shaped by Western education, class, or profession and social identities imposed by nation-states. For example, in her study of Irish immigrants in the United States, Anderock (1992) found that ethnic groups may choose to do one of three things:

1. be totally absorbed (or assimilated) by the culture of the dominant group;
2. gradually move toward totally being acculturated (or absorbed) by the dominant culture; or,
3. maintain their uniformity by modifying any attitudes or values of the dominant group using boundary rules that may minimize the possibility of assimilation or acculturation.

Thies (1987) also found that Aborigines of the East Kimberley region of Australia do not give up their traditions with the acquisition of Western education. Similarly, LeVine and White (1986) asserted that agrarian societies interpret the reality of foreign cultures within their own frames of cultural references.

One of the most important traditions upheld by all the people of Blue Pond is the social bond that ties every community member to a common ancestry, and the Ojibwe language that conveys traditional knowledge to the people. Most community people speak the Ojibwe language fluently, and a few others who have tended to lose their language because they lived outside the community for long periods of time, wish they could speak as fluently as others. The community people feel that everybody is related to everyone else in the community. Residents convey this relationship during periods of joy or sorrow. Christmas, for example, is a communal affair, which culminates in a community feast at the Recreation Center. During a period of bereavement, everybody in the community takes a holiday and partakes in burial arrangements and ceremonies.

So, to keep intact the system of kinship that developed among the people long before the influence of the Europeans—a significant element that has kept the pattern of life intact for the First Nations people of Blue Pond—and continue the system of common descent or lineage that has been the basis of the Blue Pond society, the community deems it expedient to focus on some acculturation of Euro-Canadian teachers that teach their children. To foster a common purpose behind the ideals of ancestral continuity, and to continue the powerful and thorough social system that gave to every individual status, virtue, obligations, and responsibilities within the society, all through those years when First Nations people had suffered degradation and had no rights or responsibilities in the Canadian society, the community stresses the value of unity and harmony embodied in both their children and the children's teachers.

Blue Pond First Nations tradition has not survived in the youth of the community. I did not find much evidence of the involvement of the middle-aged and young people in traditional ways of life and ways of thinking. Not many of the middle-aged and young people have close ties with the events of the Blue Pond past. As with all cultures, the culture of Blue Pond is dynamic. It is changing and adapting to new times. The ideals and ethics of First Nations life that old people take for granted are not observed by the broad spectrum of society, particularly the younger generation. This is also not surprising since the establishment of band councils by the government of Canada to administer First Nations communities and enforce law and order has much to do with the demise of First Nations culture in some First Nations communities of which Blue Pond is no exception. First Nations law has been replaced by western law and the values, customs, and conflict resolution ideals of First Nations people are largely unknown by the present generation.

The present system of First Nations administration is entirely identifiable with the Euro-Canadian model. The solution to this problem is for the community to advocate a two-way system of education. A successful implementation of a

two-way approach to education would depend on teachers' understanding of the First Nations worldview, their recognition of culture in education, and their ability to adapt teaching programs to suit the cultural conditions of the students. This study showed that in order for the school to reinforce culture, the school should work towards the implementation of First Nations language and cultural programs as a first essential. However, while the implementation of language and cultural programs may be an important step towards enhancing the cultural identity of students, their overall impact may be negligible if Euro-Canadian teachers do not possess the necessary tools to reinforce cultural values in their classrooms. As a referent for change, the community advocated a careful selection of teachers to give them the proper education and orientation needed for their teaching assignment in the community. Particularly, many respondents felt that there is the need for Euro-Canadian teachers involved in First Nations education to be well informed about the First Nations way of life. Many people believed that teachers, as well as children, should clearly understand First Nations way of life because they expected that learning should be directed as far as possible towards understanding one's self and one's environment.

To ask teachers to help promote First Nations culture and tradition was mainly for the purpose of guiding students' behavior in a way that they would give the same credence to First Nations language and culture as they would give English and other subjects. The irony of the situation is like a comedy of errors. Community people felt that teachers are unwilling to learn about their way of life. On the other hand, teachers indicated that they are willing to learn all that they can, but do not have the opportunity to be taught by the community. For herein lies the essence of participatory research that has provided us with a type of anchor for thinking about participating actively in the solution of our problems. The participatory research at Blue Pond concerned "forms of research whose aim is not to interpret the world but to change it" (Kemmis, 1991, p. 102) or "to transform the social environment through the process of critical inquiry—to act on the world rather than being acted on" (Miles & Huberman, 1994: p. 9). As a result, both teachers and the First Nations community collaborated to find ways and means of dealing with the problem of culture in the school.

Conclusion

The results of this study carry implications for policymakers to consider traditional concepts as a viable source for theorizing and conceptualizing education for First Nations children with respect to schooling within the context of the Blue Pond First Nations reserve, and, possibly, other First Nations reserves in Ontario in particular and to Aboriginal communities in general.

This study implies that educational change for First Nations particularly those living on reserves should involve not only a segment of politicians or federal and provincial school authorities, but should also invoke an integrated collaboration between community members, teacher educators, and teachers. If quality education for First Nations children is important, then educational

priorities for the children should include a reconceptualization of the role of First Nations languages and cultures in the curriculum. The deification of Western education at the expense of First Nations epistemology and worldview is an undesirable extreme to be avoided by First Nations education planners. Euro-Canadians require education and reeducation, particularly in understanding the insights, practices and mental patterns of First Nations epistemology to encourage a cross fertilization of ideas among First Nations and Euro-Canadians and to use these ideas as resources for the solution of educational problems.

The limitations imposed by the conception of “education” as bequeathed to First Nations by the Canadian government, with the characteristic failure of the system to ensure balance between “education” on the one hand and the development and the social needs of First Nations on the other create painful experiences for all First Nations. The struggle against the devastating effects of the false ideal presently pursued in First Nations education, to blindly follow the colonial heritage, should gain force through the recognition of the importance of the need for educating not only First Nations students in Aboriginal languages and cultures but also educating Euro-Canadian teachers, and even mainstream Canadian students.

This study supports other studies that call for a symbiotic learning relationship between dominant and minority groups in a society (Agbo, 2001, 2002; Friesen & Friesen, 2002). Friesen and Friesen, (2002) contended that in a democratic society, it is necessary for all people from both dominant and minority groups to learn each other’s cultures. Efforts have been made by the National Indian Brotherhood (1972; 1980, now the Assembly of First Nations) to invite Canadians to learn and share the history, customs, and cultures of the Native people. Researchers in and outside the Aboriginal community have also demanded direct Canadian community participation in sharing Native culture and epistemology. A few of such efforts attracting attention to First Nations epistemology are the works of Agbo (2001, 2002), Battiste and Henderson (2000), Friesen and Friesen (2002), and Hampton (1995). These authors suggest that today, there is a need towards a larger concept of literacy that links up with traditional First Nations concepts beyond the narrow confines of Western thinking. For example, in their book, *Aboriginal Education in Canada: A Plea for Integration*, Friesen and Friesen (2002) challenge the continuous absence, eradication, and domination of First Nations worldviews, history, and epistemology and call for Aboriginal people to make available their worldviews to mainstream Canadians. They argue that in order to effect social and educational change among First Nations, Euro-Canadians must recognize Aboriginal traditional concepts of knowledge and the unique place of Aboriginal worldview and epistemology as a necessary condition for Canadian social living.

This type of literacy should begin with a renewed sense of commitment on the part of Euro-Canadians to learn how to accept, understand, and profit from the forms and modes available for the production, presentation, and distribution of First Nations’ knowledge. In this perspective, one starting point would be to

call on all schools and universities in the mainstream Canadian society to adopt a curriculum policy that reflects Native language, history, and culture of Aboriginal people.

The present data showed that Euro-Canadian teachers in Blue Pond would like to have had exposure to material on First Nations culture and traditions while at the university. These data support those of the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning (1994) that in recommendation 127 strongly advocates the inclusion of First Nations content in teacher education programs. While many universities in Canada offer a variety of courses in First Nations education, these courses are mostly offered to students of First Nations origin. However, the irony is that over 90% of teachers of First Nations children are often Euro-Canadians (see Agbo, 1990; Canadian Education Association (CEA), 1984).

Appropriate orientation into the community through proper training involves not merely acquiring theoretical knowledge about First Nations but of acquiring the necessary tools for shaping and implementing a culturally and socially oriented concept of teaching that teachers can sustain from within, recognizing the community resources in context and reinforcing and maximizing their teaching and their own self actualization. Put simply, the preparation of non-First Nation teachers of First Nations children should develop the teachers' interethnic and intercultural skills in analyzing and finding alternatives in teaching that contribute to a complete education of the teachers by giving them the opportunity not only to better adapt themselves to the First Nations community but also to act on it. According to Darder (1991), teachers of indigenous children must critically "examine how their own views about knowledge, human nature, values, and society are mediated through the commonsense assumptions they use to structure classroom experience" (p. 86).

Another implication that arises from the study is that First Nations should desist from downplaying the importance of language and culture in their schools. As Darder (1991) rightly argued, "It is critical that educators recognize the role language plays as one of the most powerful transmitters of culture; as such, it is crucial to the survival of a cultural community" (p. 37). As an essential part of conveying culture and tradition, language is the pivot on which First Nations stabilize the alternatives they see available to them to educate their children. As Darder (1991) writes, "Within the student's native language is contained the codification of lived experiences that provide the avenues for students to express their own realities and to question the wider social order" (p. 37).

The cultural education of First Nations should focus on "educating students to the ways in which different groups struggle within relations of power and domination as these are played out in the larger social arena" (Giroux, 1988, p. 96). Darder (1991) suggested that the fundamental changes in attitudes towards Native language and culture should be reflected far beyond providing students "with curricular content that is considered culturally appropriate and language instruction in their native tongue" (p. 96). It is very important for teachers to ensure that children "are actively involved in considering critically all curriculum

content, texts, classroom experiences, and their own lives for the emancipatory as well as oppressive and contradictory values that inform their thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors” (Darder, 1991, p. 96). Therefore the education of First Nations should be an opportunity for them to develop the courage to reflect and critique the structures of domination—the underlying social, economic, and political contexts that impact their lives.

Finally, this study implies that the integration of teachers into First Nations communities should enable the teachers to retain a full grasp of the First Nations culture and the myriad of ways First Nations live their lives from day to day. Passing First Nations culture down to Euro-Canadian teachers is more than an objective transmission of facts. Since there is increasing recognition of the role of culture in education, there is the need for some profound and widespread changes in teacher preparation for indigenous groups. In many cases, there are reasons to be optimistic and to continue working on the nuts and bolts of alternative frameworks of making education culturally relevant to Aboriginal students.

Seth A. Agbo is currently Assistant Professor of Education and Coordinator of the Education and Learning Program in the College of Education at Pacific University in Oregon where he teaches Educational Research and Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education. He obtained his Ph.D. in Educational Studies from the University of British Columbia in 1996. He was principal in First Nations schools in Canada and has taught at the State University of New York at Potsdam where he also worked with public schools.

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