Collaborative Teaching for Indigenous Student Success

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ABSTRACT

Teaching a diverse demographic of students can be difficult, especially when the educator does not identify with the cultural or ethnic group of the students. For Indigenous students, this is a growing concern, as the history of Indigenous student education has largely been dominated by Eurocentrism, and the continued oppressive education is persistently hindering the opportunity for these students and their communities to thrive. Through the use of collaborative teaching, educators can employ practices that align with Indigenous pedagogies and meet the needs of Indigenous students, prompting language and cultural revitalization, and student success.

Key words: *Indigenous; Eurocentrism; anti-colonial education; collaborative teaching*

Collaborative Teaching for Indigenous Student Success

Teaching Indigenous students as a non-Indigenous educator can be quite challenging. However, alleviation of the stressors surrounding differing demographics can occur with employment of best practices surrounding Indigenous research within educational approaches (Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008; McInnes, 2017; van Wyk, 2014). Indigenous research is a concept that has recently taken the forefront in examination of Indigenous relations in academia, focusing on how research can be performed in a just and honourable manner (Battiste, 1998; Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash, 2017; Lavallee & Leslie, 2016). Through realization of the necessary steps that must be taken throughout the research process, it becomes clear that these steps must also be transferred into all settings where Indigenous and non-Indigenous persons engage.

One of these environments is the classroom, where a non-Indigenous educator may be responsible for directing the education of Indigenous students. Such circumstance makes it imperative for appropriate steps to be taken to ensure the methodologies, pedagogies, practices, resources, and materials are appropriate and provide opportunities for success, based on Indigenous paradigms (Schmidt, 2019). This practice is reflective of decolonization methodologies, which works to "unravel" the history of colonization and "[return] well-being to [the Indigenous] people" (Beeman-Cadwallader et al.2011, p. 3). Within this practice, collaboration becomes crucial to ensure the educators' approaches reflect the necessary curriculum and instruction that is required for thriving Indigenous student development (Dudgeon et al., 2017). Through the enactment of collaborative practice in education, educators will not only support the academic success of Indigenous students, but support decolonization in the education system.

Appropriate Implementation

Most commonly, the necessity to integrate the aspect of collaboration into teaching practice is for that of a non-Indigenous educator, as Indigenous educators teach with collaboration as a core component of Indigenous paradigm and worldviews (Charles et al., 2016; Dreamson, 2017; Kovach, 2010). As a non-Indigenous educator, implementation of practice that is reflective of Indigenous pedagogy and nurturing to Indigenous students can be difficult. To effectively implement critical Indigenous pedagogies into teaching practice, the educator must be open and willing to incorporate others into their practice. Aveling (2013) references Fyre Jean Graveline (2000) in stating the importance that non-Indigenous persons must heed the advice, "Don't talk about what you don't know" (p. 203). Referencing researching within Indigenous contexts, this quote also rings true for educators who are teaching on a topic that they are not familiar with.

Foremost, to ensure personal understanding of one's ability to teach on a concept or topic, they must practice self-reflexivity and situate the self within the concept or topic. Situating the self is crucial for non-Indigenous educators, as it allows recognition as to how they can and are enacting anti-oppressive education and integrating appropriate methodologies for culturally representative education (Kovach, 2010). Situating the self "authorizes expression of the relevant narrative from personal experiences" and focuses on the "earliest experience that shape our understanding of the world" (Kovach, 2010, p. 1996). Such a process allows for acknowledgement of components of the self that can affect the way an educator approaches their practice.

Upon acknowledging the self, the educator must then focus on a series of considerations prior to and throughout their practice. Such implementation requires constant attention to barriers

that might occur, as these can hinder the appropriateness of implementation, such as conflicting knowledges. It is imperative that educators, when integrating Indigenous knowledges and practices into Western academies, recognize these differences and support the coexistence and complementary status of these within the classroom (Dei, 2000, p. 120). Such practices will allow values from each culture to be presented and utilized, negating the idea that one is superior to the other is academia (Dei, 2000). Blackstock (2010) reiterates these conclusions, identifying how the social constructions that support dominant ideology must be overcome, to allow for culturally appropriate education to exist for all students. Overcoming these barriers is a key component and necessity for decolonization, as it allows for self-determination of Indigenous Peoples (Harper & Thompson, 2017). Thus, as an innovative educator, moving away from dominant approaches to education, one must be vigilant in their implementation, with strong considerations, but also persistent drive to overcome potential barriers throughout the process.

Collaborative Teaching

The concept of collaborative teaching moves away from the traditional transactional approaches to education that dominate within the Eurocentric standard of education across Canada. Collaborative teaching is a component of reflexive practice, which requires all aspect of education to be examined and investigated rigorously to ensure components are appropriately representational and reflective of students (Nicholls, 2008). This ideology is reflected by Kovach (2010) and Rix et al. (2018), reiterating the necessity of incorporating the participant or informant within the research process, or in this situation, the student in the learning process. Essentially, collaboration is the inclusion of all parties involved, which allows for the process, and all aspects of it, to be the most effective and efficient when reaching towards goals.

The Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR2014) also gives attention to the relationship between researchers and educators, in terms of collaborating with the participant, informant, or student. Within their publication, *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans,* there is mention of the importance of collaboration, ensuring that the participant or informant is given great importance (CIHR, 2014). These ideological aspects come from Indigenous pedagogy where the researcher and the research are collaborative in the sense that the effect of the research on the participant or informant is given special consideration. These core principles show that, as the effects of the research are directed towards the outcome for those being researched specifically, rather than a third party who would be reading the findings. The importance of this is paralleled in the classroom, as the student's involvement and community involvement are equally as important, as the effects and outcomes are directed toward them. Therefore, collaborative teaching is merely the incorporation of all stakeholders, to ensure that everyone has input on what is best practice.

Criticality for Indigenous Students

Indigenous student education has been in turmoil for hundreds of years, evidenced by the genocidal Residential Schools and the continued oppression against Indigenous Peoples in Canada by the Euro dominant society (Cook, 2016; Gebhard, 2017). There has been a constant shift back and forth from strategies for full-scale cultural eradication to education policies that support segregation and cultural assimilation. These on-going changes deeply affected Indigenous Peoples, cultures, communities, and relationships within the education system. As a result, it has become exponentially critical for educators to incorporate practice that is reflective of Indigenous student needs. Educators need to practice decolonization.

The idea of decolonization can be quite challenging, and difficult to digest for non-Indigenous educators, and educators who remain unaware of the stronghold that colonialism has on the education system. Despite this potential naivety, Battiste (2005) makes a strong connection between the educator and current practice. Battiste (2005) states that decolonization is only deliberated by those who are forward-thinking and who believe the earth is significant enough to warrant protection, as colonial mentality simply "endangers and subjugate[s] peoples around the world (p. 121). Battiste's ideology is based on the ideology that "Indigenous peoples live in communities where they acquire, develop, and sustain relationships with each other and with their environments" (2005, p. 122). Therefore, sustained colonial approach simply does not meet that expectation and, as educators, it is imperative to support decolonization, as a form of best practice for the future of students and society as a whole.

Effects of Collaborative Teaching

The concept of collaborative teaching can and does positively affect many factors, including culture, language, and student success. Through collaboration, there are proven successes for cultural revitalization (Chandler, 2017; Nicholls, 2008; Johnson, 2016), language revitalization (Root, 2010; Friedel, 2010; Kovach, 2010), and student success (Hampton, 1995; Barney, 2016). Together, these facets that will be changed through collaborative teaching are not only beneficial for the Indigenous students, but also for Indigenous Peoples as a whole, as it supports revitalization, self-representation, and stronger, more effective relationships within the classroom and in general society.

Cultural Revitalization

Cultural revitalization is a responsive and relevant approach to teaching that allows the sustaining of culture and revitalization of pedagogy that does not broadly exist in the western

academy (McCarty & Lee, 2014). Through collaborative teaching, there is a support of

traditional and evolving ways of cultural connectedness and it moves away from the colonial

dominance in the content and concepts being taught (McCarty & Lee, 2014). The current

sustained Western values, imposed by the use of Eurocentric language and culture throughout

society, represses Indigenous Peoples (Root, 2010). Friedel (2010) suggests opposing this

through the integration of authentic discourse and practice, supporting histories, perspectives,

and knowledges of Indigenous peoples in education through collaboration. Indigenous education

includes ancestral knowledges being passed down by Elders who are "highly valued" (Chandler,

2017, p. 178) in Indigenous communities. "Elders have always held places of distinction as

knowledge keepers, spiritual and political leaders," (Chandler, 2018, p. 178), which poses

concern as to why non-Indigenous educators take lead on educating Indigenous students.

     Further, collaboration and participation at the community level allows for social change,

as community participants become valuable within academia and the learning process (Nicholls,

2008). Collaboration is reflective of the wholistic view that Indigenous communities around the

world incorporate, as a mindset that incorporates all aspects together as one (Johnson, 2016). A

wholistic worldview is a way of learning, reflective of how knowledge is gained and how

thinking, learning, and understanding occur (Johnson, 2016; Miller, 2019). The response of

collaborative education reflects the wholistic worldview, as it incorporates non-linear paradigms

and alternatives to the dominant discourse in institutionalized education. More so, collaboration

also allows for the transmission of knowledges and approaches that would otherwise go

unshared, through personal narrative and story from one generation to the next (Johnson, 2016).

This sharing of cultural knowledge allows for cultural longevity and revitalization of Indigenous

Peoples globally (Johnson, 2016). Thus, through collaborative practice, culture can be integrated into the classroom and support Indigenous students inside and outside of the classroom.

Language Revitalization

Culturally relevant curriculum allows for strength in language revitalization, as it has the potential for altering how culture and language are understood in education (Hermes et al., 2010). The process of inclusion can also provide understanding of community, language, and knowledge production, as they are all tied into the languages that are being lost in many Indigenous communities (Hermes et al., 2012). As well, through language revitalization, Indigenous worldviews will be brought forth with more clarity, as the concepts within Indigenous languages are tightly knit to the language itself (Davis, 2017; Kovach, 2010).

Such profound effects occur because language has such powerful ties to Indigenous cultures and therefore revitalization is a direct effect of heightened cultural integration. Moreover, language, beyond the connection to culture, has a strong connection to identity, which makes it imperative to incorporate in education for Indigenous students (Hopkins, 2006). Additionally, Friedel (2010) recognizes how integration of language can support student learning, through the honouring of their culture in education, creating engagement. However, limitations towards language revitalization occur, as a result of sustained Western values, which imposes on Indigenous youth engagement, as programming is not relevant or specific to them (Root, 2010). Therefore, while the inclusion can be difficult, collaborative teaching practices promote opportunities for integration of culturally relevant pedagogy, which in turn supports language development and revitalization for Indigenous students and all Indigenous Peoples.

Student Success

The most far-reaching effect of collaboration though is student success, which is at the root of all educators' goals in terms of providing education. Hampton (1995) recognizes how the incorporation of culturally relevant materials in schooling, including culture and language, support positive attitudes by Indigenous students, towards their identity, school-community relations, and self-determination. Specifically, Hampton (1995) draws attention to the importance of inclusion of Indigenous approaches to education by referencing the relationship between tradition and preservation: "It's not important to preserve our traditions, it's important to allow our traditions to preserve us" (p. 22). Such a connection shows the criticality of implementing collaborative teaching practices. Through collaborative teaching, educators are able to generate strong connections between students and their cultural values and beliefs.

Further, the inclusion of Indigenous pedagogical approaches in the learning environment also supports student connections to the material more deeply. When students are able to interact and connect with the material being presented, they are more likely to retain the information (Barney, 2016; Bridgstock & Tippett, 2019). As well, students who would typically disassociate from the lesson or material, are now connected, retaining student attention longer and prompting more opportunities for learning (Barney, 2016; Gillies, 2019). Such a deep-seeded connection between the student and their learning alone can prompt success rates that are higher than if they are not able to connect to the material (Barney, 2016). Thus, through employment of Indigenous content and approaches in the classroom, success of Indigenous students will flourish.

Implementing Collaborative Teaching

Implementation of collaborative teaching can be challenging for any educator, especially if they are not comfortable or familiar with the inclusion of alternate approaches or educators within the classroom. Most educators utilize the Eurocentric approaches that dominant the

institutionalized education system, focusing on the colonial, top-down, structure (Abela &

Dague, 2020). These approaches persist due to the paralleled European civic identity, and the

result is reduced student engagement in the classroom (Abela & Dague, 2020). When this

approach dominants the classroom, educators can struggle with shared leadership, as it takes

away from the hierarchal structure that parallels their behaviour management strategies.

Moving away from this perspective, educators will find that they can strongly benefit

from collaborative teaching. Supporting Indigenous pedagogies is evidenced through adaptation,

preservation, sharing, and collaboration (Hopkins, 2006; Iseke & Moore, 2011). These aspects

are reflective of the interconnectedness of learning and how experiences and relationships

support learning, rather than segregation and compartmentalization of disciplines (Hopkins,

2006). The interconnectedness does not take away from one educators' ability, rather it

showcases expertise and allows for heightened benefits. Reiterating Graveline (2000), educators

should not teach concepts or content if they don't know it, so why not bring in an expert.

Open Dialogue and Democracy

Dialogue and democracy are a common trend in classrooms, allowing progression from

the traditional transactional approaches to teaching, toward student responsibility in learning and

opportunities to engage with the learning process. As well, democratic classrooms support

student voice and create diversity in perspectives that are being shared, as "democratic

procedures produce a kind of knowledge that is not available by any other means" (Levine, 1998,

p. 74). These methods are reflective of Indigenous paradigms, as they require collaboration and

open dialogue to support learning (Mackinlay & Barney, 2012). Such an approach ties into

transformational education, which is proven to allow students more opportunities to engage with

their learning and take on a role, becoming more valuable within the classroom (Mackinlay &

Barney, 2012).

Dague and Abela (2020) determined that democratic classrooms allow students to

become more actively engaged, allowing marginalized students voices to be respected in the

classroom setting. When students are given independent roles, the deliberation becomes more

effective and results in more realistic simulation with powerful benefits (Levine, 2018). Further,

students are able to take ownership over their learning, as their ideas and thoughts are supported

in the classroom, rather than subordinate to dominant ideologies (Dague & Abela, 2020).

Allowing students' voices to be heard validates the information that relates to them and creates

equity in learning. Together, it promotes a place of knowledge sharing, rather than knowledge

transmission and regurgitation.

Digital Storytelling

Story is a key Indigenous methodology, as there is a deep connection with knowing

(Datta, 2017; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). Storytelling is not a "culturally neutral form of

expression," (Kovach, 2010, p. 317) allowing ease in integration in the institutionalized

education system (Kovach, 2010). As a result, educators will be able to employ the method

within their practice without considerable transformation (Kovach, 2010). Storytelling is critical

for Indigenous students, as it has a message and value that is gained from the story (Hopkins,

2006; Wilson, 2008). Storytelling is a medium that "engage[s] with Elders, youth, and

community members in ways that provide a video reflecting the story that the community and

Elders want told" (Iseke & Moore, 2011, p. 33). Further, incorporation of storytelling as a

collaborative method ensures that "Indigenous Peoples control the images and structures through

self-representations that challenge the taken-for-granted and stereotypical representations, along

with the misrepresentation of Indigenous Peoples in dominant society" (Iseke and Moore, 2011, p. 21). In other words, when including storytelling, it is imperative to incorporate Indigenous Peoples as authors, story subjects, and even as the storyteller to enhance the value of inclusion. Thus, by using storytelling, the narrative is changing, and truths are brought into the classroom in respectful and honourable ways.

Learning on the Land

Learning on the land is a collaborative practice that allows students to learn to live and survive off the land, with teachings from a variety of peoples within the community that provide unique knowledges (Brass, 2020). Hampton (1995) recognizes how interconnectedness must exist at the local level, allowing incorporation of Indigenous knowledge keepers within the learning process, as this is imperative for Indigenous student needs. Such practice can occur through the incorporation of Indigenous Peoples when taking students out onto the land to learn. Moreover, immersion on the land allows students to learn in alternative settings, rather than through secondary sources, such as a textbook (Iseke & Moore, 2011).

Indigenous pedagogies focus on the belief that knowledge is experiential and lifelong, requiring meaningful experiences, interconnecting people, land, and place (First Nations Pedagogy, 2009). Land-based education allows students to become more engaged with their surroundings and supports development of reciprocal relationships with the land (Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation, 2018). By incorporating this methodology, there is revitalization of Indigenous pedagogical approaches, but also collaboration with those who are prepared to initiate these types of practices with students. The process becomes increasingly interconnected and a plethora of successes occur as a result.

<center>**Implications**</center>

Transforming the pedagogical approaches and methodologies in a classroom is tasking and long-term, as it requires extensive unlearning and relearning for educators and students. Unlearning is the process of moving away from the Eurocentric ideologies and towards a willingness to learn an alternative to the mainstream educational system (McGregor et al., 2018). Through this method, the concept of where knowledge comes from is re-evaluated and new methodologies become validated (McGregor et al., 2018).

In addition to changes in root educational approaches, changes will extend into the classroom and general learning environment. However, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, this long-term change has exponential value for their education in the institutionalized setting. The use of collaborative teaching parallels concepts such as democracy, transformational leadership, and a holistic approach, which are all uniquely valued in institutionalized education. Transformational leadership approaches promote empowerment of the student, educator and communities, fostering synthesized knowledge that equalizes the learning experience (Torrez et al., 2016). Similarly, democratic classrooms allow students to become more involved in their learning, encouraging participation and responsibility through independent engagement (Graham, 2018). Moreover, when a holistic approach is utilized, inclusion of students' families and communities promotes collaborative success through an all-encompassing response to student needs (Wall & Musetti, 2018). Thus, through collaborative teaching, the educator is merely employing a practice that brings numerous approaches into unison.

Conclusion

Based on the effects and potential for implementing collaborative teaching, it is without a doubt imperative that educators incorporate such a practice within their classroom, for all students, but especially to ensure Indigenous students' success. The benefits become clear when

investigating the potential outcomes for Indigenous students and Peoples. Undoubtedly, it is

necessary to incorporate materials and resources that reflect student identity, as well as

methodological and pedagogical means (Fan et al., 2019; Jamatia & Gundimeda, 2019).

Evidently, Indigenous paradigms and worldview are beneficial to everyone, Indigenous and non-

Indigenous, which also makes it understandable that these practices are lucrative for everyone.

As well, the ease in implementation ensures that any educator can implement changes to become

more collaborative, as an educator's primary goal is to support the success of their students.

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