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Integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit Perspectives in a Community School in the Northwest Territories: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study explores how teachers, staff, and community members in one school in the Northwest Territories are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages into the school and curriculum. Through the Education Renewal Initiative (2013), the Government of the Northwest Territories identified Indigenous languages and culture-based education as a priority to improving education in the NWT, while recognizing that this is a challenging task for teachers coming into the NWT from southern communities. Utilizing a generic qualitative case study methodology, this study recognizes and celebrates the many successful cultural initiatives that are currently occurring within this one school, and identifies the challenges and barriers to the successful integration of culturally relevant learning opportunities from the perspectives of members of staff in the host school. The hope is that the findings from this study contribute to guiding professional development for school staff employed in this school and region.

Keywords

Summary for Lay Audience

This study focuses on investigating how teachers, staff and community members are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages in one school located in the Northwest Territories. Specifically, this study examines and discusses professional development and resources available to teachers and outlines the successes and challenges that they face in offering culturally relevant learning experiences. Using analysis of testing data, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) has established that students in the territory are achieving at a lower level than the rest of Canada. There is also an achievement gap in the Northwest Territories (NWT) between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students, with greater disparity occurring in the smaller community schools where the student population is nearly all Indigenous (GNWT, 2013). In one attempt to address this disparity, the GNWT expects educators to engage in and offer culturally relevant learning opportunities that focus on Indigenous perspectives and culturally responsive content within their schools. Given that many educators in the NWT originate from other locales, relocate to the territory for employment, and are mostly non-Indigenous, they find this task of engaging in and offering culturally relevant learning opportunities in a manner that is both meaningful and respectful of the local Indigenous populations to be challenging. The information gathered in this case study is intended to inform and improve professional development opportunities that focus on the inclusion of culturally relevant learning opportunities for schools in the region.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background

In the Northwest Territories, there are currently forty-nine schools divided between eight regions representing thirty-three communities. Outside of the capital city of Yellowknife, there are two general geographic classifications that are relevant to contextualizing education services provided in the territories: regional centres and outlying communities (Government of the Northwest Territories [GNWT], 2013). Regional centres tend to have greater access to services, along with a greater diversity in the population. The outlying communities tend to be smaller, with relatively homogeneous populations. Given the demographic in the Northwest Territories (NWT), educators are expected to engage in and offer culturally relevant learning opportunities that focus on Indigenous perspectives and culturally responsive content within their schools. Since many teachers in the NWT relocate to the region for employment from other locales and are mostly non-Indigenous, they find it difficult to engage in and offer culturally relevant learning opportunities that are both meaningful and respectful of the local Indigenous populations. In a study that focused on integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum of a Grade 9 social studies classroom located in Winnipeg, Manitoba, teachers expressed interest in and identified the need for such inclusion but felt that there were many associated challenges with accomplishing the task (Kanu, 2011). Topping the list of challenges in the classroom were a lack of resources, teacher lack of knowledge, and the exclusion of teachers in discussions on integration. Some teachers in Kanu's (2011) study also felt that they were not in the best position to impart traditional (Indigenous) knowledge because of their different cultural background. While Kanu's study provides important insight into integrating Indigenous perspectives in an urban school located in Manitoba, there is need for similar localized research studies to be conducted in the NWT, which is in a circumpolar region of the world.

Thus, in this research study, I focused on a regional centre in the NWT with a population of 3321 residents, 2141 of whom are Indigenous, with the main Indigenous populations consisting of Inuvialuit and Gwich'in peoples (Statistics, NWT, 2014). I gathered school staff perspectives to identify the challenges and barriers in successfully integrating cultural activities in one school. School staff recognized and celebrated the many successful cultural initiatives that are currently in place at the school. While not a blueprint for the inclusion of Indigenous cultural learning opportunities in the NWT, it is my hope that the findings from this study contribute to guiding future professional development opportunities for schoolteachers and staff members employed in the region. More directly, the study findings assist me in my role as a teaching support staff member and educator who is employed at a school in the NWT.

In this chapter, I outline the purpose of the research study and present the guiding research questions, situate myself in the research, and provide a brief overview of the study. I conclude this chapter with an outline of the overall organization of the thesis and a note on terminology used throughout the document.

1.2   Purpose and Research Questions

In my experience as a resident and teacher in a community with a predominantly large Indigenous population in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region of the NWT, I encounter concerns among many teachers who are asked to integrate Inuvialuit and Gwich'in culture into the school curriculum. Further, it is the Territorial expectation that all teachers in our schools engage in and offer culturally relevant learning opportunities for students (GNWT, 2013). Therefore, the purpose of this generic qualitative research study involves how teachers, staff and community members are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages in one school located in the Northwest Territories. Specifically, this study discusses the resources and professional development available to teachers and considers both the successes and challenges that educators face in offering culturally relevant learning opportunities in one school. To meet the aims in

the purpose of this study, I was guided by the following three overarching research questions:

1) What professional development opportunities and resources are currently available in the Northwest Territories that specialize in the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages and how are they being used in the school?

2) What are the challenges for teachers, staff and community members in offering culturally, linguistically and locally relevant learning opportunities in the school and how is the school and board of education responding to those needs?

3) What are the successes for teachers, staff and community members in offering culturally, linguistically and locally relevant learning opportunities in the school and how can the school and board of education support those accomplishments?

As an educator in a school who endeavors to be culturally responsive to local Indigenous populations in the NWT, I know there is pragmatic value in having a baseline of information on the teacher supports that aid in offering culturally, linguistically, and locally relevant learning opportunities. In this study, I have investigated what is working well, why those activities work well, and explored where supports are needed to improve cultural offerings within one school. While the study findings only represent a glimpse of perspectives at one school, I intend to use the findings and the research skills and competencies that I have gained as a foundation for further exploration in to quality improvement in my local schooling context. I feel that I have established a foundation for researching and implementing planning that will celebrate success, consider the challenges and create an action plan for integrating Indigenous perspectives into local schooling contexts in the Northwest Territories.

1.3   Situating the Research(er)

In my current school, I am a Program Support Teacher responsible for assisting teachers in meeting the diverse needs of the student population in the Northwest Territories. I previously held the same position in the school in which this study was conducted. I

currently work with teams of teachers in professional learning communities (PLCs), participating in discussions and locating resources to help teachers move forward on their PLC goals. Moreover, as a parent of a daughter with Inuvialuit ancestry, I am personally invested in facilitating opportunities for teachers to enhance their ability to provide culturally relevant programming for Inuvialuit children. The school in which this study was conducted is exploring culture and land-based learning opportunities to improve attendance rates, student retention, academic achievement, graduation rates, and address student behavioural issues. Currently, the school staff members engage students in cultural activities but these offerings are often separate from the core subject areas. Based on firsthand observations, it is evident from the programs offered in schools where I was employed that Indigenous students do indeed respond to activities that involve their cultural heritage. However, cultural activities in the school largely align with the perspective of the teachers in a study by Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, and Hodson (2009) where cultural activities are added to the general curriculum, rather than being integrated throughout. In this study, I examine the challenges and success in offering culturally and linguistically relevant learning opportunities throughout the school. I then use this information to make recommendations to help direct future initiatives.

1.4 Overview of the Study

As stated previously, in this study, I examine how teachers and staff of the school are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in languages, perspectives, and culture into their classrooms and in the school, generally. Three main sources of data collection were used, including semi-structured interviews in which I employed a conversational approach, a comprehensive review of current policies, documents, and resources, and firsthand accounts from my own experiences. Throughout the research, it is evident that the school and school board are collaborating to integrate Inuvialuit and Gwich'in culture into the school, with many initiatives occurring at the school level. While there are many successful initiatives currently in place, the study participants agree that there are many challenges to successfully integrating the Inuvialuit and Gwich'in cultures into their

school, and more specifically their classrooms. These successes and challenges are outlined in the findings section.

1.5   Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is organized into five chapters. In Chapter One, I introduce the background and focus of the research study and situate myself as the researcher. Chapter Two involves a review of relevant literature and includes information specific to the current GNWT educational policies. In Chapter Three, I provide the study framework and methodology employed in the study, along with an outline of the data collection procedures, limitations, and ethical considerations. In Chapter Four, I introduce the study participants and present the data organized into six themes. Chapter Five provides discussion on participant responses as they relate to a review of regional policies and documents, firsthand observations and experiences, and the academic literature. In Chapter Six, I outline the limitations of the study, provide recommendations based on the findings from the study, discuss the implications for possible future research, and close with concluding remarks.

A Note on Terminology. According to Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, "Indigenous Peoples" is a collective name for the original peoples of Canada (Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Development Canada, nd.). Thus, I use the term Indigenous throughout the thesis to collectively represent the many communities and nations in a broader context. An exception to this statement regarding terminology occurs where I provide direct quotes from the academic literature. In these cases, I use the terms Aboriginal and First Nations as used in the source text. Given that this study focuses on a school located on the traditional lands of the Gwich'in and the Inuvialuit, I endeavored to use those distinct names of the two local Indigenous populations as frequently as possible. The Gwich'in Tribal Council (Gwich'in Tribal Council [GTC], n.d) states that the Gwich'in are the Indigenous People who have "traditionally used and occupied the land in the Northwest Territories and Yukon from time immemorial." With the use of the *Dene Kede* curriculum document, I speak of the Dene perspective. The

Dene Kede curriculum was created through a collaboration "between Elders and teachers selected to represent each of the five Dene Regions" (GNWT, 1993, p. iii), one of these being the Gwich'in Region in which this study takes place. Thus, I use the term Dene when referring to the *Dene Kede* curriculum to represent the Gwich'in Peoples in this study. The Inuvialuit are "the Inuit of Canada's western arctic." (Inuvialuit Regional Corporation [IRC], n.d.-e). Similarly, the *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum was created by Inuit and Inuvialuit Elders across the NWT and Nunavut, prior to the division of the NWT into two territories. Thus, when speaking of the *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum, I use the broader term Inuit to represent the Inuvialuit peoples

Culturally responsive teaching. For the purposes of this study, I use Gay's (2002) straightforward definition of culturally responsive teaching, which is defined as "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as a conduit for teaching them more effectively" (p.106). This definition of culturally responsive teaching fits well with the pragmatic purpose of this thesis and ease of application for teachers in promoting cultural experiences and perspectives of Gwich'in and Inuvialuit students in their learning experiences.

Chapter 2

2   Literature Review

2.1   Introduction

According to a report by the Government of the Northwest Territories (2013), there is a substantial difference between the achievement rates of students located in Yellowknife and students located in regional centres and outlying communities, with the lowest achievement rates appearing in smaller communities. This achievement gap is attributed to a lack of resources, inflated financial costs for providing education in isolated regions, classrooms with multiple grades, and a difficulty in offering a wide range of high school courses to meet the interests and academic needs of the students (GNWT, 2013). There are efforts underway by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to improve student achievement in small communities with predominantly Indigenous populations. Specifically, a focus on community partnerships and creating culturally relevant experiences is being explored to increase attendance, graduation, and overall achievement (GNWT, 2013).

In this chapter, I provide an overview of the academic literature focusing on the topics of integrating Indigenous perspectives in classrooms, integrating culturally-responsive education in Canada's north and strategies for integrating Indigenous perspectives in educational environments.

2.2   Integrating Indigenous Perspectives

Integrating Indigenous issues and perspectives into the curriculum is widely supported as one way to help improve student engagement, attendance, and achievement rates among Indigenous students (Ball, 2004; Goulet, 2005; Kanu, 2011; Sable, 2005). Jessica Ball (2004) suggests that retention and completion rates for Indigenous postsecondary students remains low. Going further, she states that "for many Indigenous students, there is neither intrinsic nor extrinsic motivation to learn the overwhelmingly white, middle class content or to engage in the types of learning activities found in mainstream post-

secondary programs" (Ball, 2004, p. 456). Sable (2005), in a study focused on grade seven and eight students learning within a Mi'kmaw reserve school, supports this notion by suggesting that Indigenous students lack interest in the general curriculum, resulting in low academic performance. In their study of Indigenous teachers teaching in various grade levels in Ontario schools, Kitchen et al. (2009) found that the teachers believed that Indigenous students did not value schooling due to the "culturally-irrelevant Eurocentric curriculum" (p. 366). While several research studies have provided valuable insights on Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers in provincial classrooms, there is a dearth of research studies that focus on classrooms located in the NWT. To assist in providing some context for this gap in the literature, this study relies on personal observations and my experiences of working in the NWT. Through firsthand observations, I have noted the struggles that Inuvialuit and Gwich'in students face in completing work in the general curriculum, yet these same students excel in classes that involve their heritage and culture. Many students who are consistently sent to the principal's office for disciplinary issues are the leaders when we host cultural activities including drum dancing and arctic sports. Many of these same students also demonstrate leadership out on the land by applying general competence in traveling, setting traps, and hunting, while showing kindness and patience to other students who may not be as skilled in these areas. Research studies clearly suggest that the integration of culturally relevant activities increases Indigenous students' engagement and interest in education focused tasks, while helping improve their sense of identity (Ball, 2004; Sable, 2005; Michell, 2007; Goulet, 2005). However, according to a report presented by the GNWT (2013), a problem arises when new teachers are hired in schools located in the NWT and who do not have experience with the local context or who have limited or no understanding of Indigenous cultures and traditions. Those teachers tend to struggle with effectively incorporating the local Indigenous cultures into their classrooms. While one recommendation from this report advises educators to embed "local culture, language, history and natural environment into student learning in order to make it more relevant and meaningful" (GNWT, 2013, p. 23), the report also states that many teachers serving the local schools are not prepared to meet this challenge. While the challenge of providing culturally-responsive education is evident among new teachers from southern Canada, it also exists

for Indigenous teachers trying to incorporate their culture and traditions into the curriculum (Kitchen et al., 2009).

Using analysis of testing data, the Government of the Northwest Territories has established that students in the region are achieving at a lower level than the rest of Canada. There is also an achievement gap in the NWT between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students, with greater disparity occurring in the smaller community schools where the student population is nearly all Indigenous (GNWT, 2013). It is clear in the data and discussion presented by the Government of the Northwest Territories that the education system is not meeting the needs of Indigenous students, particularly in the smaller communities.

While culturally relevant education has value, the literature on Indigenous education in Canada offers many other things to consider. Goulet (2001) states that "effective Aboriginal education addresses issues of culture and language, community values and norms, and power relations" (p. 70). She shares the stories of two teachers who excel in creating learning opportunities that are respectful of culture, with a focus on the importance of equitable relationships and student ownership. Through these stories, she demonstrates the importance of effective Indigenous education. The following examples also reflect and support Goulet's idea of effective Indigenous education. Ball (2004) argues that in many Indigenous communities, "generations of people do not know their own culture of origin or their heritage language, and their identities as members of an Indigenous community have been attenuated" (p. 455). Young et al. (2010) discuss the "intergenerational narrative reverberations" experienced by Indigenous peoples as a result of colonization that continue to shape future generations of Indigenous peoples. These reverberations include loss of language, cultural traditions, and family relationships. Young et al. (2010) suggest that low achievement and retention rates in post-secondary education are a result of culturally irrelevant curriculum. By offering programs designed by professionals predominantly of European descent, Ball (2004) states that post-secondary institutions do little to validate the cultural knowledge that Indigenous students bring to the program and can serve to shatter their sense of cultural

pride. In short, the Indigenous students are forced to either fit into the Eurocentric curriculum model which does not recognize the importance of their culture or choose to exit their academic programming. This notion is supported by Ladson-Billings (1995) who suggests that students who are viewed as "others" are expected to conform to a standardized curriculum. Thus, she argues that "culturally relevant pedagogy must provide a way for students to maintain their cultural integrity while succeeding academically" (Ladson-Billings, 1995, p. 476). In his work in Yup'ik communities in Alaska, Jerry Lipka (1989) suggests that offering culturally relevant education is far more complicated than "simply adding curriculum that is culturally relevant" (p. 216). In a case study of Yup'ik educators, Lipka (1991) noted that the Yup'ik teachers seemed to have more student engagement and flow of conversation in their classrooms than in those of their non-Indigenous colleagues. From this observation, he suggests that "organizing and conducting schooling in a functionally similar way to community and cultural norms account for some of the trust and smoothness" (p. 204) reported in these classrooms.

This idea of culturally relevant pedagogy is central to the program presented by Ball as a solution to the problem faced by Indigenous students. As one example, Ball (2004) offers a generative curriculum model used in providing an Early Childhood Educator program in Indigenous communities. In this model, the curriculum is constantly changing to meet the needs of the community, with participation from the students, the community, the instructor, and Elders. This model allows the instructors to lead their program with local knowledge, thus providing an educational experience that is respectful of local culture and heritage, while still providing the necessary educational requirements to be a certified Early Childhood Educator. The graduates of the early childhood educator program can provide early childhood programming within their home community that maintains their cultural heritage for the younger generation (Ball, 2004). Similarly, Lipka (1989) identified a process of collaborative curriculum development involving mutually beneficial partnerships between the school and community. The curriculum is created with the understanding that the community members ultimately know what is best for their students. This collaborative approach leads to a curriculum

that can be of value to the community while still allowing students to reach predetermined academic standards.

Sable (2005) and Michell (2007) further demonstrate benefits of the inclusion of culturally relevant pedagogy through their studies that focus on integrating culture into the science curriculum. Sable (2005) cites concerns for cultural identity and preservation as reasons for exploring culturally relevant educational experiences for Indigenous youth. She speaks of "inherent institutional racism [and teaching styles that] lack understanding of Aboriginal peoples' views" (Sable, 2005, p. 18). In findings that complement Sable's (2005) study, Michell (2007) discusses the need to connect the science curriculum to the "worldview, ways of knowing, culture, values, language, and traditional practices" (p. ii) of the Indigenous people represented in his study. Overall, there is an increase in Indigenous student engagement and focus when science lessons integrate cultural knowledge (Michell, 2007; Sable, 2005). The inclusion of pedagogy and content that value and respect the culture of the student can also promote interest in the science curriculum.

Despite efforts to include culturally relevant materials, there are well-documented barriers to this inclusion. Yatta Kanu (2011) cites teachers' lack of knowledge, the exclusion of teachers in deliberations regarding inclusion, a lack of resources, poor support from school administrators, and the incompatibility between the school structures and Indigenous values as challenges in integrating culture into the classroom. The Government of the Northwest Territories (2013) has also reported high teacher turnover rate as a barrier to academic success in the region. Based on my experiences, I have noticed that the high teacher turnover rate also has a significant impact on the inclusion of culture-based education, despite the provision of culturally relevant curriculum documents. High attrition rates contribute to a reliance on teachers who are new to northern communities. These new teachers require cultural knowledge training and localized learning experiences to implement cultural activities in a meaningful and respectful manner. Moreover, although Indigenous teachers are key players in providing culture-based learning experiences, these same teachers are not well prepared to address

these cultural concerns (Kitchen et al., 2009). Kitchen et al., (2009) also uncovered that teacher education programs do not sufficiently prepare preservice teachers for integrating Indigenous culture and language in their pedagogy.

2.3   Culturally-responsive Education in the North

While the academic literature supports the need for the inclusion of culture-based education for Indigenous students, generally, there is a dearth of research that focuses on the experiences of northern Indigenous students. In one example, Denise Kurzewski (2000) interviewed four Indigenous students from the Northwest Territories who were academically successful in completing their post-secondary education. Kurzewski (2000) was interested in common factors that contributed to their success. While all students cited the importance of a supportive family network as a key to their success in education, another common theme emerged. Their families saw the importance of obtaining an education and encouraged these students to attend school and work hard; however, they also valued cultural traditions. The students were raised in families that valued their cultural heritage and maintained connections to the culture and the land, or, as Kurzewski (2000) suggests, "pride in their homeland and heritage was evident throughout all the discussions" (p. 45). In another study involving interviews with Elders, students, and community members in Tuktoyaktuk, Raila Maarit Salokangas (2009) found that there is a disconnection between the school and the community. Again, the connection to the culture and the land emerged as a common theme to student success. Throughout her study, the local community members of Tuktoyaktuk supported culture-based activities in the school, but Salokangas was left with questions on how it is best delivered and whether southern teachers can adequately teach students aspects of their local culture. In a third example, Lipka, Hogan, Webster, Yanez, Adams, Clark, and Lacy (2005) present two case studies that focused on culturally-responsive math projects implemented in Alaska. Math in a Cultural Context (MCC) was a program developed for use in Yup'ik communities and was created through work with both Yup'ik Elders and teachers. The researchers found that the use of this program created "positive changes in relationship, both in the classroom and between the classroom and the community, pride

in identity and culture, and ownership of knowledge" (Lipka et al.,p. 383). This culturally-responsive approach with math projects was achieved while using the MCC curriculum which was locally and culturally based, and met the national standards set for mathematics (Lipka et al., 2005).

In summary, Kurzewski (2000), Salokangas (2009), and Lipka et al. (2005) all support the need for culturally relevant pedagogy in Indigenous communities in northern contexts as stated among northern populations. These studies indicate that the Government of the Northwest Territories is headed in the right direction with its mandate toward strengthening the inclusion of local cultures in their schools. Given the support for the inclusion of Indigenous culture in education, various strategies have been implemented with the goal of improving the relevance of education for Indigenous students. In the next section, I outline a few examples that focus on strategies for integrating Indigenous perspectives into Canadian schools.

2.4   Strategies for Integrating Indigenous Perspectives

Ball (2004) outlined a curriculum model, in which the instructor, students, and residents of a First Nations community were engaged in co-constructing the curriculum for an Early Childhood Educator Program. The curriculum model also provided a framework for preparing student-teachers to facilitate culturally relevant instruction in early childhood education. For Ball (2004), co-construction of curriculum involves an "open curriculum that depends upon community input" (p. 464). Community input was gathered through regular meetings that included Elders, respected community members, students and instructors. The participants reviewed and discussed different curriculum to reflect the local population and to ensure that culture is at the core of the curriculum. While Ball (2004) focuses on community involvement in the co-construction of the curriculum, Goulet (2001) supports the need for community involvement in a different manner. Based on the experience of two teachers, she offers several ideas to engage the community in the educational experiences of their students. Goulet's (2001) approach

begins by underscoring the significance of building community relationships by inviting parents and Elders into the school. During this initial stage she outlines the need to "learn about and recognize colonization" (Goulet, 2001, p. 74), and understand how the experiences of the parents and grandparents may impact their current perceptions of schools. In the case of the two teachers, the goal of inviting Elders and community members into the classroom is centred on building relationships and understanding their experiences, rather than creating curriculum. By understanding this historical context and the social stresses that their students are facing, teachers can adjust their teaching accordingly, with culturally relevant ways of dealing with student stress (Goulet, 2001). Goulet (2005) further suggests that students need to be empowered through opportunities to take ownership of school and classroom activities. She suggests that an indirect style of classroom management that involves active learning, group work, and one-on-one interaction between both teachers and students and students with students may lead to greater student engagement and autonomy.

Strategies specific to the Northwest Territories. In the Northwest Territories, teachers are presented with two curriculum documents titled *Inuuqatigiit* and *Dene Kede.* These documents were created by the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) in consultation with community members and Inuvialuit and Dene Elders from various northern communities. The curriculums implementation is mandated by the GNWT and are for use in schools and intended to support teachers in offering culturally responsive content in classrooms. These documents were also designed to provide an "umbrella under which the core subjects are integrated" (Beaufort Delta Education Council [BDEC], 2013, p. 58). While they provide valuable information, the curriculums content requires teachers to have culturally responsive knowledge, understanding and pedagogical skillsets that align with the region's locales. The suite of abilities and understanding needed to teach the curriculums is a substantive challenge, especially when factoring in high attrition rates among teachers in the NWT.

2.5   Summary

In this review of the literature, I uncovered a variety of research studies that focus on integrating Indigenous perspectives and culturally-responsive approaches in education. This academic literature provides a range of viewpoints originating from Indigenous teachers (Kitchen et al., 2009), non-Indigenous teachers teaching Indigenous youth (Goulet, 2001; Michell, 2007; Sable, 2005), college instructors (Ball, 2004), and adults (Kurzewski, 2000; Salokangas, 2009). Some studies focused on single subject areas (Michell, 2007; Sable, 2005), while others adopted a broader approach to Indigenous education (Goulet, 2001; Kitchen et al, 2009). Regardless of perspective or focus presented in the studies, some common themes emerged: (a) many Indigenous students are not engaged in the Eurocentric curriculum model that fails to include their culture and heritage; (b) Indigenous students tend to respond to attempts at integrating culture into the curriculum; (c) including student's culture and heritage within the curriculum is important in helping foster a strong sense of identity among Indigenous youth; and (d) teachers need initial and ongoing support to help meet these student needs. It is evident that teachers must understand both the importance of integrating cultural traditions and values throughout the curriculum and understand how to achieve this goal in a respectful and meaningful manner.

2.6   Conclusion

In conclusion, the research on integrating Indigenous culture and perspectives into schools has positive implications for Indigenous students. Moreover, the necessity for localized research into integrating Indigenous culture and language in K-12 schools located in the Northwest Territories is much needed and virtually non-existent. The potential outcome for not meeting the culturally responsive needs of Indigenous students in the Northwest Territories is a system that continues to fail them.

In the next chapter, I present an overview of case study methodology, outline the methods that I used in data collection and summarize my approach to data analysis. I then discuss the ethical considerations and conclude the chapter.

Chapter 3

3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In my role as a Program Support Teacher in a school located in the Northwest Territories, I am responsible for assisting teachers in meeting the diverse needs of the student population. I have often heard Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers express concern regarding their abilities in offering culturally relevant programming in the school, and they comment on their limited understanding of the local cultures and languages. I, too, have experienced similar struggles in my current role and in a previous role as an early primary school teacher. Thus, my primary interest in conducting this research study stems from my own experience and the experiences of many teachers in a local context.

Since this research study has direct implications for Indigenous students, it must be relevant to the local community or be "grounded in community needs" (Kovach, 2009, p. 149). As a non-Indigenous educator who resides and is employed in a predominantly Indigenous community, I have been tasked with the challenge of offering and engaging in culturally relevant educational experiences in my classroom and school. While I have questioned my ability to meet this challenge in a manner that is both respectful of and meaningful to local Indigenous populations, my personal experiences of working with and responding to Indigenous peoples in the region have assisted me in being mindful of local Indigenous epistemologies. Going a step further, as a parent of a daughter with Inuvialuit ancestry and as a long-standing resident in the region, I am personally invested in facilitating opportunities for teachers to enhance their ability to provide culturally relevant programming for Inuvialuit children. Therefore, while I use a generic qualitative methodological design for this research study, my methodological approach is also informed by appropriate and culturally responsive approaches involving respectful relationships with local Indigenous peoples. This research design is firmly entrenched in the needs of local Indigenous peoples (e.g., Inuvialuit and Gwich'in peoples), and it eschews any predetermined conceptual and theoretical conceptualizations developed

outside of locales within the circumpolar region of the world. Moreover, as a resident in the region and as an employee at a local school, I am held accountable to meet the needs of local Indigenous peoples daily. The suitability of a flexible and responsive methodological design is critical, and my researcher identity in a local context where I have longstanding relationships, if it is to be considered anything, is provisional. Through my professional and lived roles in the region, I am accountable to conducting (pragmatic) research that is corroborated by local needs. Thus, this study was initiated in response to the direction provided by the GNWT, which was substantively informed by local Indigenous peoples and mandated for teachers in the region. Teachers must create culturally relevant learning opportunities for students in the local community to help students engage in school, along with meeting the lack of teacher confidence in offering these opportunities. By understanding the struggles that teachers are facing, support can be offered to better meet the need of the community to have culturally relevant activities in the school. To further ensure that this study was relevant to the local community, the research proposal was submitted to local community agencies through the application for the NWT Research License or The Aurora Research Institute's (ARI) research license (the license is described in the Organizing and Analyzing the Data section of this chapter). This licensing process allowed all agencies, with a vested interest in this research, the opportunity to review the proposal and provide direct feedback or seek clarification on my research. The plan of study and follow-up report were both approved without call for any revision.

In this chapter, I provide an overview of case study methodology, an outline of the methods that I used in collecting the data and summarize my approach for analyzing the data. I then discuss the ethical considerations and conclude the chapter.

3.2   Generic Qualitative (Case Study) Methodology

In this basic (or generic) qualitative study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), I was informed by aspects of case study methodology in examining how teachers, staff and community members are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives and languages in

one school located in the Northwest Territories (NWT). According to Merriam & Tisdell (2016), "a case study is an in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system" (p. 37), that is, it consists of a single unit (or a case) with clear boundaries. In this research study, the bounded system is the school community in which the research was conducted. For my purposes, a basic qualitative (case) study is one in which the researcher does not declare it to be a "particular type of qualitative study" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). While the overall purpose of all qualitative research is to "understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 24), a basic study does not have an additional dimension. In this instance, the intent of the research was to examine the experiences of teachers in a specific locale, with the purpose of using common teacher experiences to make recommendations for professional development and resourcing supports in the region. Put another way, this research study focuses on producing pragmatic outcomes. Patton (2015) states that "pragmatism directs us to seek practical and useful answers that can solve, or at least provide direction in addressing, concrete problems" (p. 152). With this idea in mind, this research project derives its significance from case study methodology and is designed to seek practical answers to the question of how to support teachers in providing culturally relevant programming in schools.

For Merriam and Tisdell (2016), qualitative research offers triangulation of data as an approach to "shore up the internal validity of a study" (p. 244). While Merriam and Tisdell (2016) use the term internal validity, I use the term trustworthiness to ensure that the findings of the study match the reality being studied. Lincoln (1985) states that trustworthiness can be achieved when the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are present. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) further note that triangulation of data can be accomplished by using multiple methods of data collection, such as interviews, observations, and documents. Lincoln (1985) also lists the triangulation of data by using different data collection methods as a technique to improve the credibility, and therefore trustworthiness of a study. For this study, three main sources of data were used. I triangulated semi-structured interviews, a comprehensive review of current policies, documents, and resources, and documented firsthand accounts

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These three data collection procedures help provide an in-depth, rich description of what is occurring in one NWT school with a focus on culturally relevant programming. While this case study is designed to gain information at one school and is not seeking generalizability as an outcome, the research findings has transferable properties that can be expanded to the broader context of schools within the same regional school board and schools in the NWT. Lincoln (1985) suggests that determining whether a study is transferable is not the responsibility of the researcher. Rather it is the responsibility of the researcher to provide rich data that allows others to make the judgement on whether the study is transferable to their context. In this study, a rich description of the challenges and successes experienced by the participants are provided. The research findings provide enough breadth and depth to be considered for transferability in other comparable schooling environments in the region and territories.

In the next section, I describe the participant group and recruitment process, data collection procedures, organization and analysis of the data, and ethical considerations.

3.3   Participant Group and Recruitment

Prior to starting the recruitment process, I contacted the superintendent of the school board and conducted a preliminary conversation about my plan of study. I was advised that the school board did not have specific institutional requirements for ethical approval, and I was granted permission to contact the principal of a school in the region. After selecting the school based on my having previously worked at the location as a teacher, I contacted the principal at the school and received an approval for my initial plan of study. I then applied and received ethical approval from Western's Research Ethics Board before commencing the research project. This multi-leveled approval process allowed me to receive feedback from institutional leaders and add another layer of responsiveness to the needs of different stakeholders in this locale.

Since this is a case study at one school, my inclusion criteria was open-ended to all school staff members. This inclusive approach fits with the concept maximum variation

in purposive sampling, where the sample represents a wide range of the population of the study (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016). By including local Indigenous language and culture teachers, classroom teachers, education assistants, office administrators, and janitorial staff, I attempted to gain a variety of viewpoints and increase the likelihood of providing detailed and in-depth information for the study. While students and parents are vital sources of information and crucial stakeholders in the school, I chose not to include these groups in this research study for three reasons. My first rationale for excluding these other primary stakeholders stems from viewing this research study as an initial phase of engagement. My involvement as an educator in the region at a similar school will permit me to conduct follow-up consultations with parents and students. The second reason for the exclusion, which is consistent with the phased research approach, originates from my interest in establishing some baseline information from employee groups at the local school. Once I have an understanding of the school's involvement in integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages, I can then develop a flexible and comprehensive engagement strategy that will allow me to maximize participation from parents and students. Finally, a third reason for focusing on school staff members in this study concerns the feasibility and time constraints that are part of a master's research thesis. Openly engaging parents and students along with staff members would prolong the data collection period and potentially limit a robust sequenced engagement strategy containing multiple contact points.

To begin recruitment of participants for this research study, I provided an email script that was disseminated by an administrative assistant inviting all interested staff members to participate in the research project. A total of six staff members that included a diverse range of employees who had a broad range of teaching assignments responded to my invitation and agreed to participate in the study as outlined in the following: a support assistant named Alexa[1] who works throughout the entire school; Taryn and Sarah, both

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[1] To help mitigate the risk associated with violating confidentiality, all participants were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity as study participants.

teachers in administrative roles; Clarke and Courtney, both upper elementary school teachers; and Olivia, a lower elementary school teacher. Initially, I hoped for a larger group of participants, but the study was conducted near the end of the school year when teachers are quite busy. I also hoped to include at least one language and culture teacher in the study, but I did not receive any responses from this group of teachers.

3.4   Data Collection Procedures

The methods I used for collecting data in this study involved semi-structured interviews, review of current policies and documents, and firsthand accounts. In using three sources of data, I provide an outline for how staff members are supported and working to integrate Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages in one school.

Semi-structured interviews. I conducted a semi-structured interview using an interview guide with each of the six study participants. The interviews were conducted in person and in a location of their own choosing, with most occurring in the school.   A total of four different interview guides were created with distinctions added to correspond with the role of the participant within the school (appendices A-D). According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a semi-structured interview format allows for the use of an interview guide that contains both structured and unstructured questions, which are open to being modified or adapted while conducting the interview. I used the unstructured questions in a manner that allowed for a conversational approach during the interview. This conversational approach allowed the participants to delve into relevant discussions that otherwise may not be covered in the initial structured questions (Glesne, 2016). More significantly, Kovach (2009) states that a conversational method is "more congruent with tribal epistemology" (p.123) as this method allows participants to share their stories without being interrupted by structured interview questions. Kovach (2009) also suggests that the open structure of the conversational method is more respectful of the research participants. In using a semi-structured approach, I was able to gain specific information gleaned from the use of structured questions and facilitate a less structured and respectful conversational approach as I proceeded through the interview.

Review of current policies, documents, and resources. I am well versed on the policies, documents, and resources currently in place in the relevant school board, which has assisted me in completing my review. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) suggest that the researcher should identify relevant materials as the first step in conducting a document review. In this study, relevant materials were identified based on information gained throughout the interview process. Documents for review were obtained from the GNWT, the regional school board, as well as other community resources. Many documents that I reviewed were directly referenced by interviewees, while others were selected to help clarify and provide background information on topics and issues discussed in the interviews. Following the analysis of the interview data, I selected and reviewed policies, documents, and resources as they related to the themes that I identified throughout the interview transcripts. Information found in the resources and policies were noted and used to corroborate what participants shared in their interviews. In some cases, this review provided more in-depth information on programs or resources that the participants had referred to throughout the interviews. In yet other cases, this review helped to provide context.

Firsthand accounts. In my role as a teacher in a similar school as the one examined in this study, I have similar experiences to that of the participants in this study. I reflected on what was shared in participant interviews and jotted down notes about my experiences in a research journal during visits to the school. My journal was organized based on the interview guides that were presented to the study participants. In my journal, I reflected on the questions outlined in the interview guides that were asked of the classroom teacher and administrative role. I have occupied both of these roles in my time working in a similar school board. I continued to return to these notes during the analysis of the interview data. Overall, this process permitted me to corroborate and strengthen the trustworthiness of the interview findings and include personally relevant anecdotes and comments that complement the interview data.

All the data collection procedures adhered to Western's research ethics requirements and the Aurora Research Institute's licensing requirements for research conducted in the NWT, which was especially relevant for the interviews conducted with the participants (more detail on other related ethical considerations is provided in a section below). Prior to the interviews, each participant was provided with a letter of information and signed a consent form prior to participating in the study. They were advised that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Initially, I planned to digitally record and transcribe the data collected from each interview for the purposes of analysis and provided participants with the option to not be recorded. Two participants opted to decline to have their interview digitally recorded but they still wished to participate in the study. In those two cases, they consented to me taking detailed notes during and after the interview for use in the study. Each interview lasted about two hours and after transcribing the data I assigned each participant a pseudonym that was kept in an electronic file on the research support staff's password protected computer with encryption software in my home. As per Western's research ethics board guidelines, all study records will be retained for seven years after which they will be destroyed.

3.5   Organizing and Analyzing the Data

In collecting and organizing the data, Pine (2009) recommends that researchers record notes while continually examining, and comparing the data collected. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) also speak of the need to analyze data simultaneously with data collection, making the process of data analysis more focused and less overwhelming. After digitally recording the conversational interviews, I transcribed and then reviewed and coded the interview data for thematic analysis. According to Glesne (2016), "coding is a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose" (pp. 195-196). This process allowed me to group similar ideas presented in the data and label them with a code (Glesne, 2016). Correspondingly, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) outline a process for analyzing data that is relevant to both interview transcripts and document review. They suggest assigning codes to pieces of data, then sorting these pieces of data into larger

categories. Thus, in my initial review of the interview data, I made notes in the margins that were relevant to answering my research questions. The data was then read and re-read to identify common themes. I then highlighted, colour coded common themes and grouped them together. For this process, I found it easiest to cut the colour coded copy of the interview transcripts and group each similar colour coded segment together. Prior to cutting the transcripts, each comment was assigned a code that enabled me to identify the contributing participant. This process was used with all the interview transcripts. My personal reflection journal and the resources and documents were then highlighted and colour coded along with the themes identified through the process that I followed with the interview transcripts. I was then able to review and examine the coded data to uncover common themes that emerged throughout the data collection process. This led to eight broad themes, with significant overlap between each. Themes were further reviewed and rearranged to identify the following six headings: School and Board Resources; Community Resources; Professional Development Opportunities; Languages; Community Involvement; and Successful Cultural Initiatives in the School.

Ethical Considerations. Kovach (2009) outlines the following ethical considerations in conducting Indigenous research: "a) that the research methodology be in line with Indigenous values; b) that there is some form of community accountability; c) that the research gives back to and benefits the community in some manner; and d) that the researcher is an ally and will do no harm" (p. 48). In addition to me being a resident in the region and building respectful relationships with local community members for several years, I consulted with school officials from the regional school board and the local district authority to determine the process for receiving ethical approval before commencing this research study. The school officials advised that I must supply them with confirmation of the university's ethical approval and a NWT research license before receiving final written approval to commence the research study in the school. There was no further school board level ethical review process needed; however, I conducted preliminary conversations with the principal of the school to be sure that they informed the development of the proposal and to confirm that they were in support of the research. The principal confirmed their support for the research proposal and suggested that the study would make a valuable contribution to the local schooling context.

Upon receiving ethical approval from Western University's research ethics board to conduct this study, I then applied and received a research license from the Aurora Research Institute located in Inuvik, NWT (see Appendix E).

The Aurora Research Institute (ARI) research license. The Aurora Research Institute (ARI) is responsible for licensing research in the Northwest Territories. The ARI recognizes the unique needs of peoples living in the north, specifically regarding the ethical conduct of research as it occurs in a manner that is respectful of the local population (IRC, n.d.-d). For example, the IRC research guidelines outline the importance of researchers having an understanding that Inuvialuit people are distinct from non-Inuvialuit people, and that "Inuvialuit knowledge is rooted in and shapes both land-based and human relations" (IRC, n.d.-d, p. 4). At IRC, they recognize that traditional Inuvialuit knowledge can only serve to enhance research projects in the north and emphasize the need for the researcher to understand the culturally-responsive protocol for gathering data, approaching participants, and sharing information. The culturally-responsive protocol may vary by locality, so it is imperative that researchers understand the protocol and expectations of working in any community in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region, to be respectful of the Inuvialuit population while conducting research (IRC, n.d.-d). As part of the licensing process, community organizations that have a vested interest in the research study are invited to review the proposal and provide input through the ARI. When governing authorities are afforded an opportunity to provide input on the design of research studies, it increases the potential for research to be culturally-responsive and respectful to community members in the NWT.

In conducting this research study, that includes the local Indigenous population, I needed to be aware of local customs and be mindful of using culturally-responsive approaches when involving members of the community in the region (IRC, n.d.-d). In addition, the participation of respected local teachers assisted in providing researcher accountability. The research benefited the community by recognizing the significance of current cultural initiatives taking place in the school and providing insight into ways to further integrate the local culture and languages into the school curriculum. At all levels of research, I

worked to be consciously aware of the implications of my involvement in the research study and in respect of the local population.

3.6   Conclusion

In this chapter, I describe this basic qualitative research (case) study that was conducted to gain an understanding of how one school in the NWT is responding to calls from the GNWT to be more inclusive of culturally and linguistically relevant activities in the school. I outlined the methodology, study methods, including participant group and recruitment, data collection procedures, as well as the process for the organization and analysis of the data. Finally, I presented the ethical considerations that were addressed in conducting this study.

In the next chapter, I present the findings and analysis, organized by the six themes identified in the data, which are as follows: School and Board Resources; Community Resources; Professional Development Opportunities; Languages; Community Involvement; and Successful Cultural Initiatives in the School.

Chapter 4

4   Findings and Analysis

4.1   Introduction

In this chapter, I provide information on the participants who agreed to be involved in the research study, and I present the findings and analysis of what I uncovered in the interview data. Specific to my review of the interview data, I identified six themes: School and School Board Resources, Community Resources, Professional Development Opportunities, Languages, Community Involvement, and Successful Cultural Initiatives in the School. In addition to the themes, I provide personal reflections, insights and anecdotes based on my own experiences of teaching in a similar school in the NWT. Where I deemed it appropriate and as guided by the purpose of the research study, I include relevant information from regional schools, school boards, or territorial government policies and resources that relate to the interview discussion points.

4.2   The Participants

The six staff members who were interviewed in this study included the following: a support assistant named Alexa who works throughout the school; Taryn and Sarah who are both teachers in administrative roles; Clark and Courtney, who are both upper elementary teachers; and one lower elementary teacher named Olivia.[2] All these teachers, with the exception of Alexa, have filled various other positions within the school and/or school board over their teaching careers. Two of the participants self-identify as Indigenous, and four participants self-identify as non-Indigenous. Due to the small size of the school board, no further information about the study participants is provided.

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[2] Names provided are pseudonyms to protect the identity of study participants.

4.3　　　School and School Board Resources

During the interviews, all participants were asked about the availability of educational resources in the Northwest Territories that focus on the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages. I grouped the responses of the identified resources into three main categories: (a) Curriculum Resources, including *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit*; (b) human resources available within the school; and (c) other resources. The *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* are curriculum resources provided by the government to assist teachers with the inclusion of northern Indigenous cultures, issues, and perspectives in the classroom. While other curriculum resources may have cultural connections, these are the two that were most commonly referenced by participants in interview discussions. Language and cultural teachers are the main individuals who fall in the category of human resources that are discussed in this section. All study participants spoke of the wealth of knowledge that is contained among the language and cultural teachers in the schools, and participants also emphasized the teachers' willingness to share. Finally, the last category that I titled other resources, includes various books, programs, and activities that can be accessed in the school and used to deliver lessons with culturally relevant content. To begin, I provide the findings from the curriculum resources category.

4.3.1　 Curriculum Resources

Four of the six participants interviewed commented on the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum documents as primary sources for the inclusion of local northern Indigenous cultures and perspectives into schools. *Inuuqatigiit* is a curriculum document that focuses on Inuit peoples, and the *Dene Kede* curriculum document focuses on the Dene peoples. Each document includes a framework for teaching either Inuit or Dene knowledge and perspectives in classroom environments. These curriculum documents were created and are made available by the Government of Northwest Territories both as hard copies in schools and online on their website. According to the Beaufort Delta Education Council (2013), the intent of these documents is to provide the "umbrella under which the core subjects are integrated" (p. 58).

While these curriculum documents were identified by participants as being quite useful, it is evident throughout the interview responses that there are challenges to accessing them and using them effectively. For example, Olivia suggested that the curriculum documents were well-informed by Gwich'in and Inuvialuit peoples and they provide guidelines surrounding cultural beliefs and what local Indigenous peoples feel should be taught about their respective cultures. However, while they are well-informed curriculum documents, Oliva stated that their effective use required additional time to locate essential supplementary material. In one instance, the curriculum document recommends reading certain stories or legends to the class, but the stories referenced within the document are not well-organized nor are they easily accessible within the school. Olivia discussed the volume of information provided within the two resources and mentioned the significant overlap in content from one grade to the next. In response to this issue, a previous administrator took the initiative to divide the two curriculums by grade with certain outcomes covered in each grade. Olivia stated that the modification made it easier to use the resources, helped reduce redundancies in each grade, and assisted in narrowing the focus of the content to make it manageable to teach at each grade level. For Sarah, the *Dene Kede* document is well laid out and straightforward; although, she mainly kept the use of the document limited to teaching the Dene Laws in her classroom. In contrast, she found the *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum document to be harder to follow and difficult to teach. Taryn, too, found the *Dene Kede* to be quite useful in her previous role as a teacher, but has found that in her current administrative role, it is challenging to find the information that she needs in these documents and tends to default to the human resources available in the school. Clarke spoke candidly about both curriculum documents and mentioned that he has not felt confident in using the resources and identified a need for training teachers on how to use them. He sums up his position well when he said, "I'm expected to deliver a curriculum that is about a culture that I know nothing about, and I mean, it's not realistic. And to throw these curriculum documents at us and say we expect you to teach out of this, that's not fair."

In my own experience in using these resources, I agree with much of what the study participants mentioned. I found that the documents provided a lot of great information,

but with little direction on how to deliver it in a meaningful and culturally-responsive manner. In addition, as Clarke indicated, there was no instruction or training provided to help me in effectively teaching the content in these curricula. Both the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum documents reference various legends and stories, but, like Olivia, I found that the stories and legends are not accessible within these documents, nor are they organized in a designated location for teachers to access. Overall, these barriers discourage teachers from maximizing the use of these resources. While this is a case study in one school, I have taught in three schools in the Northwest Territories and this issue is consistent across all three locations.

While I have used both the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum documents in my teaching practice, my knowledge of them is not extensive. After completing interviews and finding that both *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* were commonly identified with similar issues among study participants, I decided to further review the documents to explore and assess their usefulness and effectiveness. To briefly summarize the document review, I found that both items contain extensive information on the respective cultures of each Indigenous peoples and can therefore be valuable in gaining background information to support cultural initiatives. Further details of my review are provided in the discussion chapter.

Overall, based on the interviews, my own experience, and a review of the resources, the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum documents do not provide enough information on their own. The sheer volume of information, along with the cultural specificity of the outcomes, and a lack of organization of the supporting resources make these curricula challenging to use. As Clark said, it is unfair to provide these resources without training on how to deliver the outcomes. Many of the outcomes can be, and are, approached at a school level, with opportunities provided for students to travel out on the land to learn traditional skills. Other outcomes are often covered at a surface level due to a lack of understanding of the cultures from the teachers, as both documents assume a degree of familiarity with the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures that a teacher new to the community will not have.

In terms of addressing these challenges, according to Olivia, the school had some success with a previous administrator. In that instance, the administrator assigned outcomes to each grade level and reduced the number of outcomes that each teacher had to learn and teach, thus reducing overlap in the delivery of the materials from grade to grade. To address the desire for teachers to use the stories and legends referenced within the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* documents, the school board may benefit from purchasing the various resources and having them in a designated location in each school or providing the supporting resources in an online repository that can be accessed by all teachers. In all other curriculum areas, specific training is provided on how to deliver the curricular outcomes, along with the actual curriculum documents. Similarly, in-service training is needed for teachers that includes a focus on how they can more effectively use the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum documents in classroom environments. This teacher training could alleviate some of the stress felt by educators in their attempts to read and make sense of these resources. It is important to note that the school and the school board have invested a lot of time in educating teachers about the history of the local community, residential schools, and the impacts of trauma in the region. This contextual and historical information is well-received but has focused more on the background information of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit people, and not necessarily on the teacher's own pedagogical development of incorporating the cultures into their classrooms. Details on what participants discussed concerning in-service training are provided under the heading Professional Development Opportunities.

4.3.2   Human resources

The school language teachers were highly touted as key resources in five out of six interviews. The school has language classes in both Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun, with local language instructors teaching these classes. Study participants found that approaching the language teachers with questions regarding culture and language was more effective and efficient than using the curricula provided.

Taryn stated that "the language instructors are always willing to sit down and answer questions about anything." This openness to classroom teachers among the language instructors is her experience in more than one school, and she tends to approach the language teachers before looking into the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum documents. Sarah agrees that the language teachers are always helpful when looking for information on language and culture. She frequently spoke with her language instructors to help determine if her lessons were both appropriate and accurate. Clark finds the language teachers to be "very approachable" and often seeks clarification from them, or he will use them as "sounding boards" in discussing his ideas for cultural inclusion. He finds that they have been a great source of information to him over his years of teaching in this school. Alexa and Olivia also underscored the importance of the language instructors with specific mention of them being knowledgeable and willing to help.

As with the participants in the study, in my experience, the language teachers are willing to help, are often excited when people make an effort and take the time to learn the local languages or to gain clarity on the two local cultures. In all three schools where I worked, I also asked questions and sought assistance from the teachers on the local languages.

A persistent concern that arose for me during the interviews related to the demands placed on the language instructors and the potential for occupational burn out. While it is certainly easier and quicker to approach the language teachers, I question whether it is fair for them to be placed in the role of educating teachers in the school about the local cultures in addition to their own teaching workload. In response to this challenge, Olivia recommended that the board office should have a language and culture consultant to help provide support to teachers. This additional support personnel could tailor assistance to teacher needs and avoid overwhelming the language instructors at the school. Since the interview with Olivia, the school board independently recognized the need for this position. An educator is now in place to serve as an additional support to teachers for incorporating local languages and cultures in a respectful and meaningful way.

4.3.3   Other School Resources

Five of the six study participants spoke of additional resources within the school that allow them to incorporate the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures into their classroom experiences. The resources mentioned by participants varied from person to person and pointed toward a significant number of resources available within the school.

Taryn spoke of the books *Not my Girl* and *Fattylegs* both written by Margaret Fenton-Pokiak. These books outline the personal story of Margaret, and her experience of going to residential school, as well as her return to her home community after being away. Margaret is Inuvialuk, from Sachs Harbour, and her stories include locations and communities within the Beaufort Delta region that are familiar to students at the school. These books are useful tools to help students in the intermediate grades to understand residential schools, and to help them understand the impact that the schools had on both individuals and their communities. These books and others are available in the school in the book resource room for teachers to use within their classrooms.

Olivia mentioned that there are many resources in the school that focus on incorporating Indigenous culture. She specifically mentioned math content with books and games, as well as levelled readers with attached lesson plans. For example, the Eagle Crest series is available for use in guided reading lessons in this school. While Eagle Crest does not focus specifically on Gwich'in or Inuvialuit cultures, the books feature Indigenous children throughout the book series (Eagle Crest Books, n.d.). Alexa also mentioned the Eagle Crest books, along with a website that had relevant content that she accesses with the individual students with whom she works. Caroline uses a book titled *Lost in the Barrens* by Farley Mowat for guided reading and as a read aloud resource. She describes the book as a story about a Chipewyan boy and a non-Indigenous boy who get lost in the wilderness and need to survive. She identified relatable themes in this story of survival on the land that resonate with the experiences of her students and their having spent time on the land while hunting with their families.

Clarke had an extensive set of additional resources in his classroom. In speaking with him, it became clear that many of these resources were not readily available within the school, but that he accessed them by pursuing other connections in the community. He specifically mentioned the George Blondin stories, a series of short stories and legends written by the late George Blondin who is Dene and from the Northwest territories. Many of the legends from Blondin's texts are referenced in the *Dene Kede* curriculum document. Clarke used these stories and legends in his English classes. In addition to the George Blondin Stories, Clarke sought out local community contacts for helping him find culturally-responsive book titles. He then acquired copies of *Inuit Folk Tales*, *Better Ask Nellie*, *Call me Ismael*, and *Caribou People: A Shared Future*. He found that these specific resources were useful in teaching Social Studies, and they ensured that he connected to the local curriculum documents and to the two local cultures. Culturally-responsive texts will be discussed further under the theme titled Community Resources.

In my experience, I have accessed some additional resources, including the books by Margaret Fenton-Pokiak, as well as the Eagle Crest series. These books have been available within the school. I have heard of some of the books that Clarke referred to, but do not recall having them easily accessible in the schools. As Clarke mentioned, he gained these resources through outside contacts. It is evident throughout these interviews as well as my own personal experience that there are many relevant Indigenous resources available in this region, including many that focus specifically on Northern Indigenous cultures. This information has inspired me to create resource lists specializing in Northern Indigenous cultures and to strive to work with colleagues to create a Northern Indigenous resource library within my school that increases access for teachers and students.

Clearly, there are resources within the school that focus on Indigenous culture, although many of the resources cited are not specific to the Gwich'in or Inuvialuit cultures. From the interviews with Clarke and Olivia, it was apparent that there are many resources specific to both cultures within the community, but that are not easily accessible in the school. A current challenge that teachers face in incorporating the two cultures is

knowing where to find the resources and increasing accessibility to them. Olivia suggested that there are many resources within the community and there is a need for those resources to be accessed, shared and made available within the school. More on this specific challenge will be provided in the next section, Community Resources.

4.4   Community Resources

There are many community organizations that can and do provide support to the school, both in programming and resources. Olivia mentioned the following examples: Inuvialuit Regional Corporation (IRC), Inuvik Community Corporation (ICC), Gwich'in Tribal Council (GTC), and the Inuvialuit Communications Society (ICS). Clarke spoke about the GTC, ICS, and community Elders. Sarah talked about other people in the community including Elders, the local Hunters and Trappers, cultural businesses, and the department of Environment and Natural Resources. To provide some context for each of the organizations that are mentioned, I have added some additional information here to outline their roles in the community. The IRC "was established to manage the settlement outlined in the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. IRC represents the collective Inuvialuit interests in dealing with governments and the world at large" (IRC, n.d.-a). Under IRC, each of the communities in the Inuvialuit Settlement area has a Community Corporation that control the IRC through their elected directors. The Inuvik Community Corporation is the local community corporation for IRC. "GTC is an Indigenous organization that represents Gwich'in Participants in the MacKenzie Delta of the Northwest Territories and across Canada" (GTC, n.d.). All the organizations have resources related to their respective Indigenous beneficiary groups, as well as people willing to come to the school to work with teachers, as is evident in Clarke's experience. Finally, ICS is a full-service production company, with a publishing division that produces shows, magazines, annual reports, and books, that focus on the Inuvialuit culture and communities. As a teacher who has lived and taught in the community for many years, Olivia knew about these organizations and contacted them for various resources and supports. While Olivia was able to identify organizations and access their extensive range of resources, she also stated that teachers need to be proactive about contacting them. Most teachers at the

school are often not aware of these supports or do not have insider knowledge about who to contact to access the resources. In addition to working with the various organizations, teachers are also encouraged to invite community Elders into the classroom. While efforts are being made to work with community organizations and Elders, certain challenges remain. For example, Clarke has worked with ICS and GTC. He has received funding and resources from these organizations and accessed their guest speakers to present on specific lessons to his class. Although he was successful in accessing community resources, he revealed that there is need for improved communication between the school and organizations on the availability of resources. In one instance, where Clarke was accessing an initiative to introduce Gwich'in drum making in his class, a member of the organization told him that no one had ever reached out from Clarke's host school to access resources before him. It was clear to Clarke that members of the school and members of the organization want to work together, but explicit communication is needed to support a mutually beneficial partnership. Similarly, Olivia and Caroline, who have worked in the community for a number of years, mentioned that they had difficulties locating the specific contact people who could assist them in accessing available resources within the community. Moreover, Olivia and Clarke shared experiences where they contacted organizations that had resources for circulation but the organization was unaware of who to contact at the school to determine staff member needs.

My own experience is consistent with what is outlined by study participants, as some of the organizations are quite large, and it is challenging to find the right contact. If accessing resources is a challenge for experienced northern teachers, then it is reasonable to predict that these challenges will exist for new teachers in the school and in the region. Clarke asserts that his contacts and networks within the community have gradually developed over his seasoned tenure at the school and by living in the community. Clarke also acknowledged that when he was a new teacher, he, too, did not know who to contact for support in offering culturally relevant programming.

Both Clarke and Olivia suggest having a key contact at the school that could help increase communication between the school and community organizations. Among their list of duties, this individual could hold the responsibility for proactively contacting the organizations to notify of educators needs and to collect information from the organization for dissemination in the school. Clarke stated that it only takes one person to ask, "how can we benefit each other?" Olivia punctuated the need to break down the communication barriers so that the resources could get in the hands of educators.

In addition to a designated contact at the school, Olivia felt that it would be beneficial to invite the organizations to the fall in-service training offered by the school board. All teachers in the region are present at the in-service training and it is a good opportunity to share information. Clarke, Olivia, and Caroline all suggested that contact information for these organizations, along with the supports they offer should be disseminated to teachers in some form of catalogue or compilation of resources. The resource index could provide a starting point for teachers and include grade-specific lesson samples or outline culturally-responsive extensions of the curriculum. Clarke stated that the resources should consider varying levels of complexity that range from introductory examples that are designed for new teachers to more advanced examples for "teachers who have been here longer."

With regard to inviting Elders into the classroom, Clarke mentioned that it is difficult to know who to contact and how to get funding to support and pay visiting Elders who are invited in to the school. He states "there's certainly no database of Elders [and] there's no money readily available to bring them in." For Caroline, she knows of local Elders who are available to visit her classroom, but she struggles with how to contextualize the invitation especially as it relates to matching Elders with lesson plan topics. While there is funding available for Elders in the school from the District Education Authority, Clarke, Olivia, and Alexa all agree that the current funding process is not easy to navigate. For me as a teacher, too, I found the funding application to be onerous, and I had difficulties finding people to come to the school. Many of these challenges remain

difficult even after having lived in the community for several years and having nurtured personal relationships with people.

In response to meeting some of the challenges, participants offered some recommendations on how things could be improved. Taryn stated that she appreciated having the opportunity to hear Elders tell stories during professional development and cultural days. She felt that these experiences were quite valuable, and she increased her network of contacts and gained insight into the topics they were familiar with addressing. The school board should increase the number of community engagement opportunities for teachers and incorporate ways to nurture relationships that add to teacher's knowledge and awareness of local knowledge keepers. Building on Taryn's recommendation, Clarke suggested establishing a database of Elders that included description of their areas of interest and expertise. While access to Elders and knowledge keepers is a key priority, appropriate compensation and access to funding is critical. Clarke, Olivia, and Alexa recommended that schools have a sufficient amount of designated funding that is available throughout the year, that the funding amount include regular transparent communication to staff members at the school and that there should be open access to funding (e.g., rather than a formal application process, teachers advise administration when they have an Elder coming in to their class). Currently, the application process is a deterrent to increasing Elder presence and participation in the school. In summary, teachers identified some important recommendations that include nurturing relationships between teachers and community knowledge keepers, having barrier-free access to stable year-round funding with clear communications of its availability, and creating and managing an accessible database of interested and available visiting Elders. Based on my firsthand observations and experiences, I agree that these recommended supports would certainly increase the number of teachers inviting Elders into their classrooms.

Overall, there are many organizations with valuable resources in the community that are deeply invested in establishing and maintaining existing partnerships with local schools. School teachers are interested in accessing resources in the school, in the school board, and through organizations, but there are some challenges that are creating barriers to

making these resources more accessible to teachers. To overcome these challenges, teachers offered several recommendations that can help improve the integration of culturally and linguistically responsive perspectives and increase the participation and number of knowledge keepers in classrooms in the NWT.

4.5   Professional Development Opportunities

There are many professional development opportunities available to the teachers that focus on the inclusion of language and culture at their host school. Throughout the interviews, the most referred example of professional development for teachers is the regional in-service training that occurs at the start of each school year during the last week of August. While the focus of this professional development varies each year, there is always a cultural component. All six study participants referred to at least one example from the in-service training when discussing the professional development opportunities that are available to them.

The most popular activity offered in a recent in-service training, as identified by five participants, was the KAIROS Blanket Exercise. According to its website, "the KAIROS Blanket Exercise program is a unique, interactive and participatory history lesson developed in collaboration with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and educators" (Kairos Canada, n.d.). The program normally consists of a 90-minute workshop where trained facilitators use prepared scripts to guide people through a series of embodied activities that focus on various historical and contemporaneous events in Canada. The primary purpose of the exercise is to raise awareness about Canada's (shared) history and aid in the reconciliation process between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The workshop concludes with a debrief where participants can express and process their feelings.

On reflection of my own experience as a participant in the Blanket Exercise, the sentiments expressed by study participants can be nicely summarized in the following statement from my research journal:

"As a participant in the blanket exercise in our regional in-service, I found the experience to be very impactful. It provided a snapshot of the reality of the history of Indigenous peoples in Canada and was an emotional experience for most participants. I walked away with a greater appreciation of the tenacity and resilience of Indigenous peoples, with a better understanding of their history, and knowing that they are still here and still fighting, despite many efforts to extinguish their cultures. I felt that the exercise provided a very real understanding of the history of colonization and the need to value, respect, and share Indigenous cultures in schools."

Taryn added some further perspective when she stated that "the blanket exercise really showed the importance of including Aboriginal cultures and languages and how awful it was when that wasn't included, and it was taken away."

In highlighting other features and activities offered during the regional in-service training, Olivia emphasized the value of Indigenous presenters. She felt that their contribution made the workshops more relevant, especially when the presenter provided examples of putting words into action. Expanding on Olivia's perspective, Sarah mentioned the significance of having survivors speak about their residential school experiences and how those personal narratives are highly impactful. Taryn also felt that working with local Indigenous peoples was a key component of the in-service training. She valued the time spent listening to stories shared by local Gwich'in and Inuvialuit Elders during some of the workshops that were offered. She increased her network of community members who she could invite into the school, and she developed awareness of their areas of expertise. For me, having participated in the in-service training, I, too, especially valued the opportunity to hear Indigenous leaders and Elders speak. The training affords me the opportunity to increase my networks of community educators and build cultural connections within the community.

Overall, the participants found that the regional in-service training has provided positive experiences for teachers to better understand the local cultures. As discussed under community resources, many of the study participants also felt that this in-service training

would be a good venue to provide more information on the community resources and connect teachers with the various organizations that could provide support.

In addition to the regional in-service training, the GNWT mandates that all teachers participate in cultural days. These are days when there are no students in the school, and teachers participate in activities that help them learn more about the Indigenous cultures in the communities in which they teach. Taryn discussed the value of these cultural days when she shared her experience of traveling to a school cabin with local Elders and fellow teachers. The Elders told stories and taught the teachers skills such as making bannock and plucking geese. She found that these cultural days allowed her to gain and share experiences that resonated with the experiences and knowledge of her students. Alexa also spoke about attending similar sessions on the land during cultural days. She agreed with Olivia that sharing these experiences in the classroom help her connect with her students. In another instance, Sarah referred to an experience of attending a cultural day at a local park, where Elders hosted different stations including storytelling, trapping, setting snares, and language. Both Olivia and Sarah have communicated the value-added to their teaching by participating in cultural workshops where they learned some of the local crafts, such as sewing, beading, and printmaking. While Olivia acknowledged that she is new to learning these skills, she emphasized how integrating the knowledge into her teaching instills a sense of pride among many of her students. Generally, it also demonstrates to the students that the teachers are interested in learning about the students' culture.

I had the opportunity to participate in similar cultural day activities, including trips to a local cabin with Elders who shared stories, beading workshops, traveling on the land by skidoo for a cookout with traditional foods, and learning traditional dances. I agree with Alexa, Olivia, and Taryn that these experiences help teachers connect with their students. Personally, these training activities provided me with valuable learning opportunities to meet and connect with Elders and members of the local Indigenous community who are interested in sharing their cultural knowledge.

Finally, Clarke and Caroline both mentioned that the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association (NWTTA) hosts a territorial conference every three years for all educators in the territory. While the overall focus of this conference is not specifically about learning local Indigenous cultures or about cultural inclusion in the classroom, there are always many workshops that include or focus on these components. For example, when Caroline attended a workshop about math games, a presenter from Alberta facilitated a session on how teachers could use traditional games to teach math, using sticks and dice. At this same conference, Clarke mentioned attending a session with an Indigenous storyteller. One of my most valuable experiences in attending the territorial conference involved meeting the author, Margaret Fenton-Pokiak. She shared her experiences that led to the creation of her books about residential school.

In addition to the regional in-service training, cultural days, and territorial conference, it is important to note that the NWTTA also provides annual professional development funding for all teachers. For example, teachers can apply for funding to take online courses. Each teacher is also eligible for funding to attend conferences or purchase supplies for learning a new skill, such as making slippers or parkas. While neither of these funding sources are directly intended to be used for cultural activities, teachers can choose conferences that focus on Indigenous education, or choose to purchase the materials and hire someone to teach them local crafts.

All the study participants had positive feelings toward the professional development that has been offered. While they have had many rich experiences through professional development, there has not been any program evaluation to clearly demonstrate how this training is translating into the inclusion of cultural activities in classrooms. However, this research study has uncovered some preliminary findings that show how the various forms of in-service teacher training is translating into supporting student learning. For example, Alexa, Taryn, and Oliva noted that participation in the cultural day activities has helped them connect with students. Moreover, Clarke, Taryn, Caroline, and Alexa all stated that activities such as the Blanket Exercise and hearing Elders share their stories has helped them have a greater understanding of the history of the local Indigenous

people. While these points are noteworthy, it does not seem that the professional development experiences have translated into deeply incorporating culture into classroom experiences.

In terms of suggestions for improvement, Clarke and Olivia both feel that the regional in-service training would be a great place to introduce teachers to the various organizations. Clarke also suggests that new teachers would benefit from half day or full day sessions "on where we're living, the land claims, the land and the people, the languages, and really have a comprehensive introduction to where we are." While not directly informed by this research study, some of these suggestions are now being sponsored by the regional school board and incorporated in to the regional in-service training for all educators new to the region. Clarke and Olivia also suggested that specific training is needed for all teachers in effectively integrating lessons from *Inuuqatigiit* and *Dene Kede* curriculums and felt the annual in-service training provides an excellent forum in which to offer this training.

4.6 Indigenous Languages

According to Sarah, teachers must attempt to learn and use the local Indigenous languages in their schools because it is mandated by the school board and by the GNWT. Consistent with that mandate, all six study participants spoke of the significance and inclusion of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun languages in the school. Caroline provided some context for the language classes offered at the local school when she stated that each class is split between Inuvialuktun and Gwich'in, but that "they kind of interconnect, like they both focus on beading and sewing, eating traditional foods." She also mentioned that, in previous years, all students took both language classes, regardless of their ancestral background. Now, due to the increasing number of students in the school, these classes are rearranged so that students only participate in one language class. For Caroline, she felt that it was beneficial for all students to attend both classes to promote student sharing of their culture. Adding more context, Sarah mentioned that

new language curriculums are being launched in the NWT and will focus more on phrases, with Elders coming in to assess the students through conversation.

In addition to the language classes, Olivia, Sarah and Clarke shared approaches that they use to incorporate language learning into their content-area classrooms (i.e., not an Indigenous language focused classroom). In Olivia's classroom, she incorporates some Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun words in alphabet games and tries to use basic greetings and commands with her students. In consultation with language teachers to ensure accuracy, Sarah has learned a song in Inuvialuktun and has taught it to her students. Similarly, Clarke has also worked with language teachers and students to learn songs in Inuvialuktun alongside them.

Outside of the classroom learning environment, school-wide effort is also made to ensure that both languages are visible and used in the school. Olivia, Alexa, and Sarah all referenced the language teachers who use bulletin boards located in the hallways to post language material. The content included on bulletin boards is changed in accordance with the seasons and there are pictures that include words using both the Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun languages. Posters were mentioned by Taryn and Sarah as another example of visual content used throughout the school, which are also supplied to teachers to post in their classrooms. The posters offer examples of basic greetings in both the Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun languages. Everyone is strongly encouraged to actively engage with all the posted content and practice using the words daily. One other example worthy of note, as identified by Sarah, are the television screens in the school that were used for announcements. The screens used basic written phrases that were included in the rotation of notices. Unfortunately, the television system stopped working so this venue for sharing the languages is no longer available. Complementing the school-wide visual learning is one example that supports auditory learning. Alexa noted that the daily morning announcements include greetings in Gwich'in, Inuvialuktun, English and French.

While the languages are being used in the school, much of the language use seems to be focused on basic greetings and phrases. Taryn, Sarah, and Alexa all mentioned that they greet students using the Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun languages. Since my experience

teaching in this school, I do feel that more teachers are making an effort to learn and use the two local languages. The visuals posted around the school certainly provide a great number of reminders to staff, students, and visitors. I have also been inspired to expand my own vocabulary in each of the languages. While my pronunciation is not always accurate, I have observed firsthand how my efforts are always appreciated.

The main challenge identified by participants concerning use and learning the Indigenous languages is not having language proficiency and/or feeling uncomfortable using the languages. Caroline simply stated that "a challenge would be not knowing the language itself." In response to this fundamental challenge, the participants offered a few recommendations that may provide some initial support in helping them overcome their concerns. While the school-wide postings are certainly helping teachers with exposure to the language, Taryn suggested that having the language teachers teach a basic phrase at each staff meeting would be beneficial. Teachers could then practice and use that phrase until the next meeting. Alexa said that she just needs to practice speaking the languages more herself. Previously, under the heading Human Resources, I noted an additional concern relating to the demands placed on the language and culture teachers within the schools and the potential for occupational burnout. Again, this concern arises as the language and culture teachers are viewed as the language leaders within the school and are heavily relied upon to share their knowledge and expertise with not only the students, but also the staff. More research is needed to determine how best to support language teachers in the school and identify the range of supports needed in this multifaceted role.

4.7   Community Involvement

The GNWT and regional school board always encourages teachers to get involved in their local communities; however, there are some challenges at the outset, as Clarke outlines in his comments:

> "it's primarily non-Indigenous teachers in this school. Administration is non-Indigenous, and many teachers are non-Indigenous…and when an Indigenous person looks at this school, what they see is kind of a non-Indigenous approach to

education, and so they're not necessarily reaching out to us because they maybe they don't feel invited. I'm just guessing, right? Maybe they don't feel invited, maybe they don't feel welcomed."

Clarke's comments point to an important consideration in engaging community members. The onus must be placed on school staff members to reach out to community members and facilitate activities that help members of the community feel welcome in the school. Clarke went further to assert what he believes is part of his role as an educator in building relationships: "you go above and beyond and you make an effort and you show your face, you shake a hand, you get to the community events." Fortunately, staff members of the school and school board are working to increase community involvement and develop and apply several different strategies to bring people into the school or to have staff members engage in community to nourish relationships.

One strategy discussed by Taryn, Olivia, and Sarah is an initiative called book and bannock. This event happens several times each year at the end of the school day on a Friday. Taryn noted that teachers, often with their students, prepare bannock or another snack, along with tea. Parents and community members are invited into the classrooms to enjoy a cup of tea and a snack while reading with their children or family members. Older students often come to the classrooms of younger students to read with children whose parents may not be available to attend. In Sarah's experience, book and bannock brings parents into the school in a positive way and suggests that the school can build on this and bring parents in for other activities.

A second strategy to promote community engagement identified by Sarah and Clarke is their involvement on a committee that is tasked with Indigenizing the school. Sarah mentioned that they hope to expand their activities to include annual traditional community feasts that would bring several community members into the school to meet the teachers in an informal context.

In a third strategy, research participants suggested that their presence in the community is important. For Clarke, being able to offer culturally relevant programming stems from his

decision to reside in the local community, as he reports here: "being in the community and being a part of the events, and things like that they connect you with the people." Taryn, too, says,

> "just being present in the community events to get that understanding of the community…that's something that's already encouraged…to do that as local as our school, to our school board, all the way up to Education Culture and Employment. They all encourage teachers to be involved in their communities."

Having a presence in the community means that many teachers choose to attend community feasts, dances, and celebrations in order to get to know the community and become more accessible to the community members.

In a fourth strategy, the school facilitates participation in community events by scheduling a cultural day on Inuvialuit Day. Inuvialuit Day is scheduled each year on June 5th and is the anniversary of the signing of the Inuvialuit Final Agreement. The community celebration includes a public barbeque featuring traditional foods, along with demonstrations of cultural activities including arctic sports and drum dancing. Caroline says that it is a big celebration of Inuvialuit culture located in the main park in town. According to Taryn, with the cultural day scheduled during this celebration, teachers can be present and experience the celebration with the community.

Generally, a large part of community involvement simply means that teachers and the school are working to build relationships with the community and students. Earlier in her career, as a teacher new to the region, Sarah said that she had students tell her that they did not want to get to know her because they believed that she would just leave. Historically, the school has experienced high rates of teacher attrition. She feels that it is hard for students to invest in relationships with teachers when they do not trust that they will stay in their jobs. Being present in the community helps break down these barriers and demonstrates to the students that the teachers want to be involved in their lives, want to learn about their cultures and languages and are invested in their success.

4.8   Successful Cultural Initiatives in the School

Based on the interviews with research participants it is evident that this school has many successful cultural initiatives to celebrate and to build upon. Among the successful cultural initiatives hosted by the school, I uncovered that they occur in three interconnected learning environments or physical settings that are as follows: (a) cultural initiatives in the classroom, (b) cultural initiatives in the school as a whole, and (c) cultural initiatives on the land. In the following sections, I provide details on each of these learning environments.

4.8.1   Cultural Initiatives in the Classroom

All six study participants discussed at least one initiative where they have tried to incorporate culturally relevant activities into their classrooms, or in Alexa's case, where she has participated in these activities with students that she supports.

Taryn and Olivia both spoke of using the school Heritage Fair program as a way to enhance their content-area classroom and encourage students to study their own culture. In the Heritage Fair program, students from grades four through eight work individually or in pairs to create a heritage project on a self-selected topic that is significant to them. In the lower elementary grades, classroom teachers and students work together to create one large class project that celebrates culture and heritage. After completing the in-class component of the projects, the students present them at the school's annual Heritage Fair. There are a range of culturally relevant project topics including those that focus on hunting and trapping, animals of the region and how they have been traditionally harvested, plants of the region and their uses, interviews with Elders, and various other aspects of the local cultures. Taryn specifically mentioned projects on carving, jigging, fishing, and hunting. In addition, many students choose to focus on other topics that include examples like Canadian history, the history of a sport or activity in Canada, and, for students who are not from the region, to showcase their own cultural background.

In discussing the Heritage Fair projects, Taryn spoke of the value of students self-selecting topics in the classroom especially for students who may otherwise be hesitant to

complete classwork. She has supported individual students with projects of their own choosing and found that the work they completed went beyond what was generally produced by these students in the regular classroom. This additional student effort suggests that self-selected topics effectively promote student engagement. For Taryn, this positive outcome in student engagement has led to her encouraging teachers to adapt in-class writing assignments that allow students to focus on their culture and self-select topics. In Olivia's experience as an early elementary Social Studies teacher, she has found value in focusing on a whole class approach to the Heritage Fair projects. For example, she chose to select the broad overarching topic of animals of the region and then encourage students to self-select their animal and consider including local cultures and beliefs about the animal. Olivia's approach was highly beneficial in helping her meet the content-area curriculum outcomes in Social Studies.

In another approach for introducing cultural initiatives into the classroom, four participants mentioned hosting Elders in the school. Taryn pointed to the availability and value of having school funding that sponsors visiting Elders in classrooms. She also spoke of one Elder who reads to kindergarten students daily. It was also noted that many teachers, like Olivia and Clarke, invite Elders into their classrooms to tell stories. Clarke shared an experience where he invited an Elder into his classroom to talk specifically about the history of the local community, and the Elder also shared his experiences of being born and raised in the community during its early development. While the Elders program has had success, some participants also mentioned recent challenges. For example, Sarah felt that the Elders program was once quite successful, with very regular visitors, but noted that the program is no longer as consistent as it once was. She would like to see an Elder in the school fulltime, who would be available to share their experiences with classes and teachers, and they could be encouraged to listen and chat with struggling students in the school. In contrast to some of the other teachers, Caroline noted that she is aware of how to access visiting Elders for her classroom, but she has not invited anyone yet. She felt that she lacked awareness in knowing how to incorporate Elders into her lessons in a meaningful way. In my own experience, I found it challenging to find Elders to come into my classroom, partially due to a lack of

established community networks but also due to Elders busy schedules. I found that the normal school schedule periodically conflicted with the Elder's schedule, and the Elder needed to attend to cultural activities including hunting, trapping, harvesting, and other commitments.

While not a consistent approach among all teachers, each teacher does have their own individual strategies and ideas for integrating cultural initiatives into the classroom. Olivia tries to Indigenize the content-area curriculum but recognizes that she does not do it all the time. In her efforts, she incorporates culturally relevant information when discussing topics such as foods, animals, and appreciation of the land. She also uses Gwich'in and Inuvialuktun words when playing word and alphabet games in class, and she provided a specific example of a math game that she uses in the classroom. In this game-based learning activity, the students are rewarded for mastering math facts. Each student starts with a picture of a sled without a dog team, and when they master a certain level of math facts, they earn their first sled dog image. They keep going until they have mastered all grade appropriate math facts and have earned a full dog team. Olivia pairs this with instruction on the historical importance of dog teams in the region when students learn about regional animals and respecting the land. Caroline also alluded to culturally appropriate math games that she recently learned at a workshop. However, as of the time of the interview, she had not used the learning activities and planned to incorporate them into her math programming soon.

In their efforts to include cultural initiatives in the classroom using literature, Caroline and Clarke have both used stories referred in the English language arts curriculum to help students connect with their culture. Caroline read the book titled *Lost in the Barrens* with her class and used the content from that story to incorporate activities that had students considering their own experiences out on the land while hunting and fishing. Clarke was able to obtain a copy of the book titled *George Blondin Stories* and designed lesson plans around those that included group and shared reading. As stated previously, the late George Blondin is an Elder from the Northwest Territories, and the stories in the book include traditional legends from the Dene people in the region.

A challenge in offering cultural activities in the classroom in a respectful and meaningful manner connects back to the previous discussions under the heading School and board resources. Generally, the activities that attempt to incorporate Inuit knowledge, Dene perspectives and Indigenous culture into the classroom tend to be limited or involve superficial inclusion. Deeper meaningful inclusion is a struggle that I have seen with both new and experienced teachers, as well as local Indigenous and southern teachers. Overall, no teacher wants to un/intentionally misrepresent some aspect of the Indigenous cultures of the region, or present information in a manner that could be viewed as disrespectful. Without more extensive in-service training on how to incorporate culturally relevant activities, the circumstances surrounding teacher's knowledge is not likely to change. In the next section, I discuss cultural initiatives that take place in the school but are not specifically integrated into the classroom environment.

4.8.2   Cultural initiatives in the school as a whole

All six study participants discussed various school-wide initiatives that focus on the inclusion of culturally relevant activities. These examples include larger full or half day events and smaller cultural activities that are coordinated by school staff members and available to teachers for scheduling and substituting class time. Clarke and Sarah both mentioned a committee, called the Indigenous Culture Committee, that was formed with the goal of increasing Indigenous culture within the school. Both Clarke and Sarah are active members of this committee and have played a role in coordinating some of these events and activities.

One key event that was discussed throughout the interviews is the school's mini jamboree, which is organized by the Indigenous Culture Committee and intended to be an annual event. According to Clarke, the mini jamboree is modelled after the community jamborees that are typically held over a long weekend in the springtime in each of the communities within the region. These community events are a time to come together to celebrate spring and a successful spring hunt. Community jamborees often have some

games of skill, such as tea boiling, bannock making, muskrat skinning, goose plucking, and log sawing, and silly games and races.

Clarke, Sarah, and Olivia all mentioned the mini jamboree as a positive cultural experience in the school. In describing the jamboree's program, Clarke and Olivia advised that both the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures were represented throughout the scheduled activities, and the itinerary was structured to have groups of students rotate through different stations throughout the day. Some examples of the activities hosted at the different stations include the following: harpoon throw, nail driving, geese plucking, hide tanning, snowshoe art, silly games, and arctic sports. Clarke's personal appraisal of the most recent jamboree suggested that "the day went really well, and the activities, and the kids had a really good time…and the community was involved." Unfortunately, due to teacher turnover and increasing demands on teacher's time with some teacher's faced with burnout, the mini jamboree has not become an annual activity as initially planned. Overall, according to both Olivia and Clarke, the mini jamboree was well organized and well received by participants, but it was held during a busy time of the year and it demanded a lot of time and effort from organizers in planning and managing the event.

In a second example of a larger school-wide cultural initiative, Taryn, Olivia, and Caroline all mentioned the Northern Dene Games Summit that the grade six students join. While this event is open to students from grades four through to twelve, the school in this study only sends students at the grade six level and up, largely due to overall participant numbers and to allow greater participation from the surrounding communities. This regional event is hosted at the local high school, involves students from all eight JK-12 schools in the region and hosts competitions in arctic sports and Dene games. In addition to the grade six student competitors attending the event, Taryn stated that other students who are in alternative programming offered through the elementary school also have an opportunity to attend and assist with food preparation.

In addition to larger events, there are examples of smaller school-wide cultural activities that were discussed by research participants. For example, five study participants

mentioned that the school coordinates lessons in Inuvialuit Drum Dancing and Arctic Sports. Drum dancing is a series of "songs and dancing to recount legends, stories, and traditions" (IRC, n.d.-b). The drum dancers' actions are performative and are usually reenactments of great feats from previous generations. Similar to drum dancing, arctic sports are an important part of the traditional way of life for Inuit and Inuvialuit people. The arctic sports first originated as games during a time when the Inuvialuit were seminomadic (IRC, n.d.-c) and these competitive activities were considered important for their survival. Specifically, the games helped individuals develop strength, endurance, resistance to pain, and nurtured skillsets required for a successful hunt. In the lives of children, these games were used to prepare them for life on the land, and they were also a celebration of culture when communities gathered together (Sport North Federation, 2006).

With both Drum Dancing and Arctic Sports, the school hires instructors to come into the school to teach each of the corresponding skills. According to Sarah, drum dancing lessons are provided two times per year for eight to twelve weeks each time, leading up to Christmas and then again in the spring. All five participants who discussed Drum Dancing and Arctic Sports agreed that they were organized at the school level and that teachers were responsible for sign up of their class to attend lessons. These five participants attended both drum dancing lessons and arctic sports with their classes or individual students. Olivia and Sarah noted that many classes attend drum dancing lessons and continue to practice in class in order to perform at the school Christmas or spring concerts. According to Olivia and Caroline, the students are always very engaged with both arctic sports and the drum dancing. Moreover, Caroline was so impressed with student engagement and student enjoyment of the arctic sports initiatives that she obtained her own classroom equipment. This set of equipment allows students to practice during downtime or when they are on a break. Taryn specifically commented on how the school's inclusion of arctic sports had the added benefit of positively impacting the arctic sports instructor. She observed how happy he was to be invited into the school to share his knowledge of the games with the younger generation.

While these school-wide programs are appreciated and beneficial, there are some issues and problems that have arisen. Caroline and Olivia pointed to the example of drum dancing and the high frequency of cancellations by those who coordinated the cultural activity. Olivia also identified how she felt that the drum dancing content was too repetitive, and, in commenting on the arctic sports, she also observed cancellations that had occurred. Where cancellations happened, Olivia noted how students were always disappointed because these were eagerly anticipated activities.

In this final section, I outline school cultural initiatives that take place outside of the school and out on the land.

4.8.3   Cultural Initiatives on the land

All six study participants revealed some aspect of school programming that occurs on the land. A key aspect of the on-the-land programming at local schools is having a dedicated and skilled coordinator to lead and manage the events. Sarah, Oliva, and Taryn mentioned the school coordinator who is tasked with organizing all on-the-land experiences for two local schools. Generally, the coordinator is responsible for selecting and overseeing grade appropriate activities that involve day trips and overnight trips. Olivia and Sarah both noted some challenges and limits to the coordinator's availability for activities across the two schools; however, Olivia also acknowledged that the coordinator role was recently upgraded from a half time to a fulltime position. She hopes this will allow the coordinator to offer more outdoor cultural experiences for all students, but recognized that the position is responsible for supporting fourteen grade levels (JK-12). As a teacher in an administrative role, Taryn had a unique perspective of the on-the-land programming. She sees the benefit of allowing students who require alternative education to extensively integrate on-the-land programming as an option for students, especially when an older student can serve as a leader for younger students. She has found that the on-the-land coordinator is often willing to help students develop crucial leadership skills as well as a sense of belonging in the school by allowing them to be helpers on various day trips. In the following, I offer some examples of on-the-land programming and conclude with some challenges in enhancing the programming.

In making use of the coordinator's support for an on-the-land initiative, Caroline was able to send some of her students to go moose hunting on overnight trips that lasted two to four days. Caroline also noted that many of the kids who were able to attend these trips are often those students who are not offered an opportunity to travel on the land or hunt with their families. For kids without easy access to certain land based activities in their home life, this program is particularly valuable for them in establishing a stronger connection to their culture. Having taught in the school, I was in attendance following a successful school hunting trip when a moose was harvested and brought back to the school. The on-the-land coordinator hired local hunters to demonstrate how to process the moose meat and lead the group through the butchering process. Every student in the school had the opportunity to work on the moose and cut some meat to take home to their families. While this lesson was occurring, the language and culture teachers demonstrated how to cook the meat and allowed the students to try samples. Initially, this example of an on-the-land trip only involved a few students but evolved into a rich cultural event that allowed for the participation of all students.

At an introductory level, most of the on-the-land programming involves day trips. For example, according to Caroline, each class has a yearly excursion to a small frozen lake located on the edge of town. While on the frozen lake, students learn how to set a fish net under the ice and check the net for fish. Time at the lake allows students to listen to the language teachers share stories and learn basic phrases in each of the two local Indigenous languages. These net fishing trips typically last half a day and all classes in the school are provided an opportunity to participate.

In an example of an initiative associated with learning about the land, Caroline talked about the Pingo Pride event, which involves an annual class trip for grade six students traveling to Tuktoyaktuk, NWT. The trip is coordinated by the on-the-land coordinator along with members of Parks Canada. The event focuses on educating students on Tuktoyaktuk's pingos, which are naturally occurring hill formations that only develop in regions with permafrost.

Cultural initiatives on the land make significant contributions to integrating Indigenous perspectives into educational environments, but there are some challenges in offering the programming. One main challenge identified by study participants is the limited amount of programming that can be accomplished with only one coordinator for two schools. While all current on-the-land activities are highly valued, Sarah would like to see more opportunities for more students to get on the land for overnight trips. Similarly, Olivia and Alexa both mentioned programs that occurred in previous years that were coordinated by outside organizations but have since been discontinued. For example, the Gwich'in Tribal Council used to run on-the-land programming through the Rachel Reindeer camps initiative. Based on what was shared by study participants, these opportunities were coordinated and funded by outside organizations and are no longer being sponsored. In another instance, Clarke identified a unique challenge that he faces in wanting to provide more outdoor programming for students that he could lead on his own, but acknowledged that he is unsure of where to begin. In recommending a solution, Clarke said he would like to see the school and the school board create outdoor classroom spaces for teachers and students. In other recommendations to meet current challenges, research participants made the following suggestions: hire more people to support the on-the-land coordinator and increase and revisit local and outside community partnerships that promote and offer on-the-land programming.

Overall, this local school has many rich cultural experiences to offer its students. Many of these opportunities are currently outside of the classroom and, therefore, are observed as existing outside of the general curriculum. Some teachers feel that a challenge arises in meeting all curriculum outcomes with so much time spent outside of the classroom. The challenge of maintaining that balance between offering these cultural experiences and still reaching curriculum outcomes is a key challenge that the school board and the school will need to address, perhaps by assisting teachers in understanding how to weave culturally relevant activities throughout the curriculum, and how to effectively use the resources already provided.

4.9   Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduce the study participants and present the findings from the interview data. Where I deemed it appropriate, I provide insight from my own experience to support the evidence provided by the teachers. I uncovered six common themes that were evident throughout the interview transcripts and are identified as follows: school and school board resources, community resources, professional development opportunities, languages, community involvement, and successful cultural initiatives in the school. Throughout the interviews with participants in this study, it is evident that the host school has many successful cultural initiatives. These initiatives are offered in classrooms, in school-wide settings, and on the land. The main challenge that arose for participants is in offering culturally relevant experiences to their students while balancing the overall school curriculum. In the next chapter, I offer a detailed discussion of the findings and provide some concluding words.

Chapter 5

5   Discussion

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) is invested in improving educational outcomes for students in the territory, which includes a directive that all teachers will engage in and offer culturally relevant learning opportunities in educational schooling environments (GNWT, 2013). However, the GNWT also recognizes that many teachers are not fully prepared to meet this culturally responsive challenge (GNWT, 2018). After five years into the Education Renewal and Innovation (ERI) Framework, which is a ten-year initiative, the GNWT has recently concluded its first major evaluation. Among eight recommendations in the report[3], teacher training and development remain an enduring priority (GNWT, 2018). While the government's ERI evaluation provides a high-level review of the three major geographic areas in the NWT (i.e., Yellowknife; regional centers and small communities), the evaluation lacks context-specific description of what is working well and what challenges exist in various locales across the NWT. In response to this research gap, participants in this study make a contribution by providing examples of success and challenges in offering high quality culturally relevant learning experiences in one schooling context. Consistent with what is identified in reports from the GNWT (GNWT, 2013), this study uncovered several challenges and barriers that teachers face as they navigate their roles in offering culturally relevant programming. Based on the findings in this research study, I argue that many of the challenges noted by participants can be addressed at a local level by those individuals who are currently present within the school, the school board, and the community. If members of the school and school board can work together and conduct meaningful

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[3] The other seven recommendations involve the following items: (a) "make small communities a greater priority"; (b) improve "mental health and wellness supports"; (c) continue support for "Indigenous languages curriculum at all levels, as well as the new health and wellness curriculum"; (d) re-examine the usefulness of academic achievement tests "as an assessment tool"; (e) monitor and report on the introduction of new "enhanced supports for students in grades 10 to 12"; (f) place emphasis "on ensuring all new JK-12 initiatives are in line with the foundational statements and goals of the ERI Framework"; and (g) "continued monitoring and evaluation…for the JK-12 education system to determine if…efforts are improving student outcomes." (GNWT, 2018, What Are the Recommended Next Steps? section)

engagement with local community members, I see great potential in this one school's ability to offer more integrated culturally relevant educational programming, while still allowing time to complete other learning outcomes in content area curriculums.

There is one substantive caveat to my above argument that stems from the participant group involved in this research study. To briefly reiterate from a previous chapter, all six study participants have several years of direct or commensurate experience in the northern community of the host school. Moreover, two of the six participants are local Indigenous educators. Therefore, the challenges faced by the educators in this study are not solely due to a lack of experience or challenges associated with high rates of teacher attrition. High teacher turnover presents another major challenge at a broader level (GNWT, 2013). For example, high attrition rates result in new teachers entering schools who may not have culturally responsive training, locally developed community relationships, or on-the-land experiences to assist them in facilitating culturally relevant learning opportunities. In these instances, for new teachers to be comparable to participants in this study, they require training, matching length of employment experience in a similar context and/or immersion in the social life of local Indigenous peoples. These local or relevant competencies are only acquired through an investment of time and self-directed effort by the educator.

I have divided this chapter into two sections titled Resources and Professional Development. Across both sections, I discuss and synthesize participants' responses with insights gleaned from reviewing regional policy documents, personal experiences and firsthand observations and relevant academic literature. Throughout each section, I address the challenges identified by study participants. In the first section on Resources, I discuss and review relevant resources identified by participants during the interviews. In the second and final section, titled Professional Development, I discuss the professional development opportunities identified by study participants.

5.1   Resources

All six study participants agreed that the school has many resources available to assist in offering learning opportunities that are culturally and linguistically relevant for students. Two key resource documents discussed in the interviews were the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum manuals. As previously stated, these resources are provided by the GNWT to help teachers focus on the integration of northern Indigenous issues, cultures and perspectives. The study participants identified these curriculum documents as being quite valuable resources; however, educators also felt that they require additional support and training before they can effectively facilitate student learning of the content knowledge contained in each of them.

In my review of these documents, I noticed that there is a significant amount of relevant information provided on the Dene and Inuvialuit perspectives of child development. For example, the Inuvialuit believe that learning occurs in stages and that all children grow and learn at their own pace. Historically, much of this learning occurred through practice with their parents, first by learning through play, then by working alongside their parents (GNWT, 1996). In the Dene perspective of child development, the child is the future. Each child is born with integrity and they are distinct with each having their own unique gifts. This wholistic viewpoint of child development emphasizes the need to support and facilitate opportunities for children to participate in a variety of informal learning experiences. Also, within the Dene perspective, it is noted that school is not equal to education. Education is a broader concept and involves learning that occurs throughout one's daily life experiences. In addition, Indigenous children place value on being aware of the reasons why they are learning specific information and content (GNWT, 1993).

In the instance of this research study, Indigenous child development is derived from a local philosophy of education that is responsive to Dene and Inuit perspectives on learning. For any new teacher without knowledge and understanding of this philosophy, they can expect the task of culturally responsive teaching to be quite difficult, if not insurmountable. This challenge is compounded when teachers, who are new to the region, aim to gain a basic awareness about culture rather than participating in

experiential learning that is embedded within the daily realities of the local Indigenous communities. It is plain to see how this Indigenous view of child development, as represented in the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum manuals, is incompatible with the current model of education employed in schools in the NWT. This issue of incompatibility is not isolated to the NWT. Kanu (2011), too, found that a mismatch between the school structures and Indigenous values is one of many challenges in integrating culture into the classroom. Despite the difficulties, Lipka (1991), much like Kanu, does provide some hope when he explains that the "interactional style and relationship between the students and the teacher" (p. 204) are key classroom variables that account for some of the success seen in classrooms that he has studied in Alaska. He further speaks to the importance of conducting schooling in a manner that is "similar to community and cultural norms" (p. 204). Considering the work of Kanu (2011) and Lipka (1991), educating teachers on the Dene and Inuvialuit perspectives of child development could serve as one entry point in a professional development series of levelled learning that leads toward improving teacher facilitation of all curricular outcomes in the school. Moreover, showing teachers how to structure classroom experiences in a manner that aligns with local cultural norms could enhance student-teacher interactions and relationships in more meaningful ways.

However, despite making classroom learning more meaningful to each student, there are many specific learning outcomes throughout both the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculums that a teacher from outside the community (and many from within the community) cannot meet on their own. For example, the *Dene Kede* has a learning outcome that the students will demonstrate that they know how to trap (GNWT, 1993). This learning outcome is a challenge for most teachers to meet, since they tend not to have these skillsets, especially for those who are originally from a place outside of the community. Moreover, having the specialized pedagogical content knowledge to teach a group of children to trap adds an extra level of difficulty for teachers and anyone who facilitates learning of this specific skillset. While a straightforward solution to this issue may involve bringing in a community resource person with the requisite skillsets to lead this lesson, participants in this study noted that it also takes time for teachers to build

relationships and earn the trust of community members. Since most of the culturally-responsive learning outcomes are met as part of the on-the-land programming by one coordinator, it is virtually impossible to cover all of these outcomes for an entire school's student population. This challenge is underscored by Caroline when she suggested that many of the current overnight trips only include a small number of students. In one promising example that offers some guidance for attending to these challenges, the Math in a Cultural Context (MCC) curriculum is a "supplemental culturally based math curriculum" developed through a "long-term collaboration with Yup'ik Elders, teachers, schools, and communities" (Lipka et al. 2005, p. 368). This curriculum "is based on Yup'ik cultural knowledge and norms, and seeks to bridge the culture of the community with that of the school" (Lipke et al. 2005, p. 368). In the example of the MCC, the math curriculum supported the integration of culturally relevant hands-on activities in an approach that linked program expectations to the everyday knowledge of the community (Lipka et al., 2005). Through a similar approach applied in the host school referred to in this research study, educators could connect their content-area lessons to everyday Inuit and Dene experiences and cultural knowledge. This approach would allow students to meet a key priority in the *Dene Kede* curriculum by developing a community-based and practice-informed rationale for learning content-area curriculum alongside culturally relevant skills.

A common frustration that study participants expressed with regards to the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum manuals is the reference or referral to other sources to meet lesson objectives. Participants identified how challenges arose when these necessary resources were not readily available nor were they easily accessible in the school. For example, the *Dene Kede* refers to the story *Yamoreya and the Giant Beaver* (GNWT, 1993, p. 74), but does not include an appendix with a written version of the story or indicate how a teacher may gain access to the story (i.e., is it based in oral storytelling tradition or is it written in a text that can be used as a print or digital resource?). Without these supporting resources being organized in an accessible manner in each school or online, it is unlikely that they will be used extensively in many classrooms. In contrast, during my review of resources, I found an online resource titled *Legends and Stories*

from the Past: A Teacher Resource for Dene Kede Grades K-9 by George Blondin. While this online resource is accessible as a link on the GNWT website under approved curricula for Aboriginal Language and Culture, none of the participants mentioned it as one that they have accessed and used in their classrooms. While I was not able to explore why this resource missed being mentioned by teachers, it points to a need for developing a central archive of online materials and developing training that supports teachers in using the materials referenced in the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculums. Corresponding with the needs of teachers, many research participants advised that the support and training is currently insufficient, especially for respectfully and meaningfully integrating the many resources available to them. Kitchen et al. (2009), too, stated that teachers found "teacher education programs to be of limited value in preparing them for teaching Aboriginal students" (p. 361). In this study with in-service teachers, all participants were struggling with the implementation of integrating culturally relevant experiences, and they all struggled with implementing the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculum outcomes.

One other challenge that was identified by some participants is the difficulty in managing classroom instructional time. Teachers must meet curriculum outcomes in their core content area(s) and attend or participate in cultural activities with their class. Regardless of years of experience, all teachers rely on skilled local community members or other human resources (e.g., on-the-land coordinator, Elders, and school employee and community member volunteers) to facilitate offering culturally responsive learning to their students. Many participants appreciated opportunities to meet with local knowledge keepers and Elders, but more could be done to assist teachers in developing their human resourcing networks. Adding roles to people who can serve as intermediaries and introduce teachers to local community experts would lessen some of the self-directed demands placed on teachers. In addition, hiring more on-the-land support staff to assist the on-the-land coordinator could provide some relief to teachers. Having more on-the-land staff members could provide support through a division of labour where on-the-land programming evolves into its own content-area. Conventionally trained school teachers

would then not be needed at every event and the need for an extensive amount of in-service training would be lessened.

The specificity of the outcomes presented through the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* documents necessitate community partnerships and accessibility to digital, print, community and human resources. On a basic level, teachers must be provided with support that increases access to resources and provides focused professional development training that maximizes the use and range of resources available to them.

5.2   Professional Development

Throughout the interviews, most discussion on professional development focused on opportunities that helped teachers gain a better understanding of the history of colonization and impacts on aspects of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures. For example, some formal professional development workshops involved Indigenous presenters addressing topics such as the history and impacts of residential schools, cultural resilience, and the history of European contact with Indigenous peoples. The Kairos Blanket Exercise was widely noted among participants as one of the most powerful professional development experiences they completed. According to Goulet (2001), this is an important step for the school and school board to take, as she believes that it is necessary to "learn about and recognize colonization" (p. 74). While this professional development opportunity provides excellent background and foundational knowledge for educators, it is not easily translated to a classroom experience without community support. Opportunities to learn about the two local cultures were also mentioned as examples of memorable workshops, with examples covering the following topics: storytelling, sewing, traveling to camps, and learning how to set traps and snares. This professional development aligns well with the need presented by Goulet (2001) to build community relationships and to understand the experiences of the parents and grandparents, as teachers engage with local community members and Elders while learning traditional skills. Both types of professional development are essential to helping educators understand the historical context of education in the NWT while

providing experiential learning opportunities that allow educators to connect with Elders, the community, and students through hands-on activities. Study participants all recognize the value of these professional development opportunities as providing foundational knowledge and community connections, and want them to continue; however, it is also evident through the interviews that more support is needed in translating these experiences into meaningful classroom activities.

As an example of a professional development need for teachers, some participants identified increased support for Indigenous languages and cultures. Educators in the NWT currently teach in a system that values literacy and numeracy as key indicators of academic success, as is evident through the abundance of training that teachers receive throughout the year to enhance instruction in these areas. The amount of training support provided to enhance instruction in literacy and numeracy is not the same for Indigenous languages and cultures. Indigenous Language Educators do receive training to implement the language and culture curriculum; however, all teachers are being asked to include language and culture in their classrooms and are not receiving significant additional training to assist with these goals. In many schools, the Indigenous languages and cultures classes are viewed as electives versus the normal content areas that are part of the core curriculum (e.g., English, Math, Science and Social Studies). This inequity begs the question: why are the cultures and languages of the local Indigenous population not considered core content areas in NWT schools? While there appears to be a slow shift occurring for increasing investments in Indigenous languages and cultures, these investments still have a long way to go before Indigenous languages and cultures are viewed in the same light as the core subject areas. It remains critical that languages and cultures be supported with professional development and training opportunities for teachers and that these aim to be, at least, comparable to what is offered for other subject areas.

Consistent with Goulet (2001) current professional development offered by the school and school board is providing teachers with opportunities to learn about colonization and the history of contact in the NWT, as well as hands-on experiences to build relationships and connect in a meaningful way with community members. However, with the goal

presented by the GNWT that all teachers will engage in and offer culturally and linguistically relevant learning opportunities (GNWT, 2013), it is necessary to provide direct support that will help teachers translate the professional development provided in an integrated, meaningful, and respectful manner.

5.3   Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss some of common themes and challenges identified in participant interviews, including resources and professional development. I discuss participant responses while providing insight from academic literature, personal experience, and policies. In the next chapter, I outline limitations of the study, recommendations arising from the study, implications for future research, and end with concluding remarks.

Chapter 6

6 Conclusion

The purpose of this generic qualitative research study focuses on investigating how teachers, staff and community members are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages in one school located in the Northwest Territories. Specifically, this study examines and discusses professional development and resources available to teachers and outlines the successes and challenges that they face in offering culturally relevant learning experiences. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What professional development opportunities and resources are currently available in the Northwest Territories that specialize in the inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages and how are they being used in the school?

2) What are the challenges for teachers, staff and community members in offering culturally, linguistically and locally relevant learning opportunities in the school and how is the school and board of education responding to those needs?

3) What are the successes for teachers, staff and community members in offering culturally, linguistically and locally relevant learning opportunities in the school and how can the school and board of education support those accomplishments?

Three main sources of data collection were utilized in this generic qualitative case study that included: semi-structured interviews, a review of current policies, documents and resources, and firsthand accounts from my own experiences. Through the interviews, six common themes emerged that are as follows: (a) School and School Board Resources, (b) Community Resources, (c) Professional Development Opportunities, (d) Languages, (e) Community Involvement, and (f) Successful Cultural Initiatives in the School. The information gathered in this case study is intended inform and improve professional development opportunities for schools in the region. Based on the research study findings, which is organized and analyzed from interviews with a specific group of

experienced educators at one school, I argue that many of the challenges identified in this study can be addressed collaboratively by individuals in the community and with staff members currently employed at the host school and at the school board.

This chapter is presented in five sections. In the first section above, I summarized the research project, and, in the next section I outline the limitations of the study. In the third section, I use information gleaned from participant interviews, the review of current policies, documents, and resources, and firsthand accounts to make recommendations on how this one school and school board can tailor professional development experiences to support teachers in offering culturally relevant learning opportunities. In the fourth section, I discuss the implications of this study and make recommendations for future research. Finally, I conclude with some final remarks.

6.1   Limitations of the Research Study

While my intention in this research study was to gain a more comprehensive sample size from the local school beyond six participants, I did achieve some success in recruiting individuals with a range of educational experiences. Research participants included members of the local Indigenous populations and those who had previously taught at other schools in the NWT. While I was not aiming for generalizability across the territory or nationally in Canada, my research findings were consistent with a large-scale evaluation conducted by the NWT. This consistency with the territorial evaluation suggests that my research findings has some transferability across schools in the region and will likely resonate with other teachers employed in the NWT. However, there are two major groups missing from the study that include new teachers and language and culture teachers. While I had hoped to engage both groups in this study, they did not respond to my call for participation. Future research studies will need to give specific attention to those groups to build a more comprehensive analysis of teachers' experiences in the region.

In a second limitation to the study, I chose to focus on school staff members' perspectives, rather than interviewing students and the broader community. I recognize that students, parents and members of the broader community play an important role in making a vital contribution to the school and educational contexts, generally, especially surrounding culturally relevant education. However, for the purpose of this study, I felt that I would take a phased approach to including all stakeholder groups. My employment in the region allows me to follow-up for a future study that will involve students, parents and members of the community.

6.2   Recommendations

The research findings from this study make it clear that there are many successful initiatives happening in this one school in the NWT on inclusion of Indigenous cultures and languages. In probing further, I uncovered that most of these additional initiatives occur outside of the classroom and can create difficulties for teachers who must also facilitate learning of content area curriculum. In adding another layer of difficulty, there is the expectation that all teachers must offer culturally relevant learning experiences in the classroom and in school-wide educational environments. Also uncovered in the research findings are several main challenges for teachers, including the insufficient knowledge and understanding of the local languages and cultures, lack of familiarity with the cultural curriculum documents, limited access to appropriate supports, and lack of confidence in independently offering culturally relevant learning opportunities that adopts a pedagogical approach that is meaningful and respectful.

To respond to these challenges some key recommendations coming out of this study focus on support or investments in designing and providing professional development experiences to support teachers in three main areas: (a) increase, diversify, and continue professional development in-service training, (b) build, support, and utilize local Indigenous print, digital and human resources, and (c) initiate a strategy for community-based curriculum development.

Increase, Diversify, and Continue Professional Development In-service Training.
Professional development is an area of strength. Participants spoke of many professional development opportunities that addressed the historical context of education in the NWT through guest speakers and group activities, including the Kairos Blanket Exercise. Additionally, participants valued the opportunities that have been provided for experiential hands-on learning, including on-the-land professional development as well as story-telling, learning about traditional foods, and learning traditional arts and crafts. As these experiences are valued, it is recommended that this kind of training continue to be offered to new teachers and increased to include levelled learning for all teachers within the school. With each story told, and each on-the-land experience, there are always new connections to be made and new lessons to be learned. These professional development opportunities can be diversified by providing them to a large group of teachers during the regional in-service training, they can be offered as smaller community focused activities (e.g., offered during the regularly scheduled cultural days at the school), or they could be expanded to support additional qualifications or master's level training, including short courses on Indigenous land-based education (e.g., Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning offers various Indigenous Land based programming and learning opportunities and is headquartered in Yellowknife, NT) or graduate level studies on land-based education (e.g., the University of Saskatchewan offers a Master of Education program on Education Foundations with a focus on land-based education).

Build, Support, and Utilize Local Indigenous Print, Digital and Human Resources.
Based on the information gathered from this study, I recommend that more professional development time be dedicated to navigating the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculums, with examples of how they can be implemented in the classroom. Time should be dedicated to reviewing the support resources and assisting teachers in understanding and using the materials currently provided, which includes Dene and Inuvialuit perspectives of child development. Going a step further, Clark and Olivia both spoke extensively about the resources available in the community that are not being accessed by people in the school. Dedicating a focus to enrichment activities through professional development that involves connecting teachers with local community

resources and networking with local community experts would be quite valuable for teachers. The intent of this enrichment training should involve preliminary preparation by a local cultural broker who works with community people and teachers to help bridge the cultural divide. In an effort to increase the use of locally relevant print, digital, and human resources, I recommend creating a community or regional resource database for use by teachers and local community members. As noted in various interviews, there are many organizations in the community and in the region that can support culturally relevant educational programming within this school, but many teachers do not know who to contact to access these supports. In addition to the database, providing an opportunity for teachers to connect with key personnel from these organizations will help break down barriers and establish or renew partnerships between the school and the community. As a further recommendation, while volunteers are the bedrock of many community initiatives, it is important that community experts are appropriately remunerated for their educational services, especially for Elders, local knowledge keepers and on-the-land experts who are being expected to lead initiatives (e.g., chaperoning on a field trip and leading educational initiatives are markedly different labour with the latter falling in the domain of teaching). In addition, hiring more support staff to create a team of on-the-land educators to assist the on-the-land coordinator would be of great benefit to teachers. Therefore, I recommend that the school board hire an education coordinator to establish an action plan, to support and increase access to on-the-land and culturally responsive activities in the local schools, and to develop targeted training for teachers on integrating culturally responsive learning into educational environments, with a focus on mobilizing the *Dene Kede* and *Inuuqatigiit* curriculums.

Initiate a Strategy for Community-Based Curriculum Development. Participants identified many successful cultural initiatives that are occurring in their host school. Many of the initiatives they identified are activities that take place outside of the regular classroom. While each teacher maintains some strategies for integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit issues, languages, cultures, and perspectives into their own classroom experiences, there is not a consistent school-wide approach to achieving this goal.

While previous professional development has provided a foundation for teachers in better understanding the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures, these opportunities have also helped teachers understand the history of colonization and build relationships in the local community. However, moving toward a deeper and fully integrated approach for Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures, where it is present throughout the curriculum, will take significant effort. For example, Ball (2004) offers a generative curriculum model in which the instructor, students, and members of a First Nations community co-constructed the curriculum for an Early Childhood Educator program that was culturally relevant. Similarly, Lipka et al. (2005) discussed a collaborative process that met academic standards in the math curriculum and connected content-area learning outcomes to the everyday knowledge of the community. Therefore, I recommend developing a strategy and an implementation plan, containing short-term and long-term goals, that focuses on the development of co-constructing culturally relevant content-area curriculum with teachers and members of the local community. This school is in a unique setting where the Indigenous population represents most of the local population within the community. Furthermore, with Gwich'in and Inuvialuit as the two main Indigenous populations in the area, rich discussions between teachers and members of the community could lead to co-creating content-area curriculums that are fully integrated into the local school.

6.3   Implications for Future Research

This case study research represented the views of staff members of one school with a limited number of staff members represented among the participants. Future research should focus on communities in similar regional centres that would serve to provide more localized information in these contexts. Moreover, comparable research studies could be used to determine if there are significant differences between regional centres and what distinctions exist between regional centres and the other two geographic areas in NWT (e.g., Yellowknife and smaller communities). In addition, I noted in the study design that although parents and students are vital sources of information and crucial stakeholders in the school, they were not included in this study. Future research must be directed at collecting parent and student perspectives on the school's cultural activities to provide for

a fulsome representation of this one community context. For example, in her study conducted in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT, Salokangas (2009) found that the community members did value culture based activities in school, but questioned whether or not southern teachers were in the best position to teach these lessons. In another example, involving a case study of the Yup'ik community in Fairbanks, Alaska, Jerry Lipka (1989) suggests that creating school-community connections is more complicated than simply adding in culturally relevant curriculum. He further states that the community needs to view the school as a resource to the community and see that the school is supportive of the community's efforts to move forward. Both of these studies present a broader community view on the school's efforts and abilities to offer culturally relevant learning opportunities. In the case of this one school in the NWT, to gain a better understanding of the community views on what the school is doing to support culture-based education is an essential next step.

6.4   Concluding Remarks

This study stems from the mandate that the GNWT expects all educators to offer and engage in culturally relevant learning opportunities that focus on Indigenous content and perspective in NWT schools. In this study, I examined the successes and challenges of offering culturally and linguistically relevant learning opportunities in one school in the NWT. Specifically, I highlight the experiences of six educators as they respond to the mandate to offer culturally and linguistically relevant programming in their school. I use the research findings to guide discussion and make recommendations that may help support teachers in becoming more effective in integrating cultural knowledge into their classrooms. By sharing the stories of educators in one school, it is my hope that the concerns of the study participants will be considered and that the recommendations from this study can help guide future professional development for teachers in the NWT.

As a non-Indigenous educator from southern Canada, I found that I was not well prepared or well-trained to fully engage in culturally responsive teaching that was specific to the two local Indigenous cultures represented in my NWT school and community. In my

current teaching support role, I found that the responses from many of the research participants in this study, where they have feelings of inadequacy in offering meaningful cultural learning opportunities, are echoed in my sentiments and those of many of my colleagues, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. While one of the marks of trustworthiness in the findings of qualitative research relates to transferability to other contexts, I am most gratified by the realization that I feel confident in making decisions that will have some evidence-informed support as I continue in my role to help improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide-Group 1 (Classroom Teacher/Language and Culture Teacher)

Integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit perspectives into a community school in the Northwest Territories: a case study

1. Tell me about your role and responsibilities in the school. (Classroom teacher K-6, Language and Culture Teacher)

2. Have you participated in any professional development training that focused on the inclusion of Aboriginal cultures and languages in the school?
   a. If yes, how have you used that professional development experience in your teaching?

3. Can you tell me about the resources that are available to you that focus on the inclusion of Aboriginal cultures and languages in the school?
   a. How have you used these resources in your teaching?

4. Have you designed or delivered any Indigenous language or culturally relevant lessons for students in your classroom. If yes, please describe.

5. Can you tell me about any other culturally relevant activities and programs that occur in the school that specifically focus on the Gwich'in culture and/or language? Inuvialuit culture and/or language?
   a. What was your involvement in these activities?
   b. What was most successful about the delivery of the activities or programming that was provided?
   c. How can the school and school board continue to support these initiatives?

6. What are the challenges or barriers that you see in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school that focus on Gwich'in culture and/or language? Inuvialuit culture and/or language?
   a. How can the school and school board respond to these challenges?

7. What else would you like to share about your experiences in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in the school?

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide-Group 2 (Support Assistant)

Integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit perspectives into a community school in the Northwest Territories: a case study

1. What is your role in the school? (Classroom teacher K-6, Language and Culture Teacher, Support Assistant, Custodial, Administration)

2. Tell me about a professional development experience in which you have participated that focused on the inclusion of Aboriginal cultures and languages in the school.

3. How have you used this professional development experience while supporting your students?

4. Tell me about the resources available to you, that are focused on the inclusion of Aboriginal cultures and languages in the school, that you have accessed.

5. How have you used these resources while supporting your students?

6. Describe other culturally relevant activities and programs that occur in your school that focus on the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures.

7. Tell me about your involvement in these activities.

8. How do you feel the school and school board can continue to support these initiatives?

9. What are the challenges or barriers that you see in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school that focus on Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures?

10. How do you feel the school and school board can respond to these challenges?

11. What else would you like to share about your experiences in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school?

APPENDIX C

Interview Guide-Group 3 (Custodial staff and Administration Assistant)

Integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit perspectives into a community school in the Northwest Territories: a case study

1. What is your role in the school? (Classroom teacher K-6, Language and Culture Teacher, Support Assistant, Custodial, Administration)

2. Describe other culturally relevant activities and programs that occur in your school that focus on the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures.

3. Tell me about your involvement in these activities.

4. How do you feel the school and school board can continue to support these initiatives?

5. What are the challenges or barriers that you see in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school that focus on Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures?

6. How do you feel the school and school board can respond to these challenges?

7. What have you seen in the school that demonstrates a commitment to teaching the local cultures?

8. What else would you like to share about your experiences in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school?

APPENDIX D

Interview Guide-Group 4 (School Administration)

Integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit perspectives into a community school in the Northwest Territories: a case study

1. What is your role in the school? (Classroom teacher K-6, Language and Culture Teacher, Support Assistant, Custodial, Administration)

2. Tell me about a professional development experience in which you have participated that focused on the inclusion of Aboriginal cultures and languages in the school.

3. How have you used that professional development experience in your own practice?

4. Tell me about the resources available to you, that are focused on the inclusion of Aboriginal cultures and languages in the school, that you have accessed.

5. How have you used these resources in your own practice?

6. Describe other culturally relevant activities and programs that occur in your school that focus on the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures.

7. Tell me about your involvement in these activities.

8. How do you feel the school and school board can continue to support these initiatives?

9. What are the challenges or barriers that you see in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school that focus on Gwich'in and Inuvialuit cultures?

10. How do you feel the school and school board can respond to these challenges?

11. What else would you like to share about your experiences in offering culturally relevant activities and programs in your school?

APPENDIX E
Northwest Territories Scientific Research Licence

2018
Northwest Territories Scientific Research Licence

Issued by:	Aurora Research Institute - Aurora College Inuvik, Northwest Territories
Issued to:	Dr. Brent Debassige
Affiliation:	Western University
Funding:	
Team Members:	Dr. Brent Debassige; Janna Wolki
Title:	Integrating Gwich'in and Inuvialuit perspectives into a community school in the Northwest Territories: a case study
Objectives:	To investigate how teachers, staff, and community members are integrating Inuvialuit and Gwich'in issues, perspectives, and languages in one school in the Northwest Territories.
Dates of data collection:	January 23, 2018 to November 15, 2018
Locations:	Town of Inuvik

Licence No. 16287 expires on December 31, 2018
Issued in the Town of Inuvik on April 12, 2018

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Pippa Seccombe-Hett
Vice President, Research
Aurora Research Institute

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2007-2008 Bachelor of Education

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Awards: 2007

Recreation Leader Award, Northwest Territories Recreation and
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Corporate Scholarship, 3M Canada
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2014-June 2015, November 2015-Present

Program Support Teacher/Grade 1 Classroom Teacher
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