

Northern Rural and Indigenous Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions of Rural Teaching and Teacher Education

(Received June 24, 2018 - Approved December 18, 2018)

Shelley Stagg Peterson¹, Laureen McIntyre², and Denise Heppner³

Abstract

This paper summarizes themes of rural teaching and rural students' experiences of initial teacher education programs based on focus group data of 25 Canadian northern rural and Indigenous teachers and early childhood educators. Inductive analyses of focus group data identified themes related to living and teaching in northern rural communities. A strong sense of togetherness and support, coupled with inconsistent/limited access to material and human resources, were highlighted in participants' experiences as teachers and as members of their Indigenous and rural communities. Additionally, participants talked about the expectation that their role extended beyond the classroom to reciprocate with support for their community. Themes arising from participants' initial teacher education experiences suggest a need for greater attention to the significant lifestyle adjustments and identity transformations that rural students must make when moving from their communities to urban centres to complete their teacher/early childhood educator preparation.

Key Words: Rural teachers, indigenous teachers, rural teacher education, northern teachers

Introduction

The impact of place is starting to be inserted into conversations about equity of educational opportunity. Researchers examining registration in postsecondary education programs are identifying the underrepresentation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students from remote parts of Australia and Canada (Berryman et al., 2014; Bradley, Noonan, Nugent & Scales, 2008) and lower high school completion rates in rural areas, as compared to urban areas, in both countries (Abbott-Chapman, 2011; Canadian Council on Learning, 2006).

The term, "metro-centric" has been applied to teacher education programs (Stack, Beswick, Brown, Bound, & Kenny, 2011, p. 2), suggesting a lack of recognition and attention to issues related to teaching in rural communities and supporting rural students within teacher education programs. Also becoming an important part of these conversations is the significant and enduring impact of Canadian historical and con

¹ Shelley Stagg Peterson, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, University of Toronto. Email: shelleystagg.peterson@utoronto.ca, ORCID: 0000-0001-6985-5603

² Laureen J. McIntyre, Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education, University of Saskatchewan, E-mail: laureen.mcintyre@usask.ca, ORCID:0000-0002-8362-9271

³ Denise Heppner, Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, University of Toronto. Email: denise.heppner@mail.utoronto.ca

temporary assimilationist policies and practices, such as residential schools of the 19th and 20th centuries, and the implementation of Eurocentric curricula and pedagogy (Battiste, 2008; Cherubini, Hodson, Manley-Casimir, & Muir, 2010; Styres, 2017). Clarke Surgenor, Imrich, and Wells (2003) observed that many rural communities have high proportions of Indigenous members, and noted that, “it is difficult to have a meaningful discussion about rural education without addressing the challenges facing Aboriginal students” (p. 22). It is important to work with Indigenous community members to address the outcomes of assimilationist and genocidal Canadian government policies and practices that have led to “multi-generational educational failures among Indigenous peoples and educational outcomes well below the national average” (Battiste, 2008, p. 86). These inequities point to the need for further examination of rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers’ professional and initial teacher education experiences in order to inform initiatives geared toward equity of educational opportunity within teacher education.

In this research paper, we report on northern rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers’ experiences as teachers and members of their rural communities, as well as their experiences as rural students in urban faculties of education in initial teacher education programs. These research questions guided our study:

1. How do northern rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and early childhood educators characterize teaching and living in their communities?
2. How do participants describe their initial teacher education experiences as rural students moving to urban areas for postsecondary education?

We begin with a review of the literature on rural teaching and initial teacher education for rural teaching. Following a description of our research methods, we present themes arising from analysis of focus group data and discuss them in terms of this literature. We conclude with implications for initial teacher education.

Literature Review

Teachers’ Roles, Relationships and Challenges in Rural Schools

There is often a strong bond between rural communities and their schools. The schools may host town meetings, dances, movie nights, sports events, and other special community events. Teachers often participate in many of these events (Clarke, et al., 2003; Jervis-Tracey, Chenoweth, McAuliffe, O’Connor, & Stehlik, 2012). As a result, teachers and parents “do not exist in separate worlds but are united with others in the community into a milieu of common purpose and direction” (Chance, 2002, p. 233). Indeed, rural teachers are generally respected as community leaders who guide children in the classroom and within the community as a whole. The result is an overlap between teachers’ professional and personal life (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

In addition to being an integral part of the community, rural schools often have a family-like atmosphere, as deep, supportive relationships develop between administrators, educators, parents, and students (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Goodpastor, Adedokun, & Weaver, 2012; Preston, 2006). These relationships lead to a sense of collective/shared responsibility for student learning among all school staff and between teachers and parents.

In Indigenous and non-Indigenous northern rural schools, teachers face challenges related to heavy curriculum and extracurricular loads, and issues arising from geographic isolation. It is common to find the rural educator teaching multiple grades and subjects outside their specialty areas (Barley, 2009; Hellsten et al., 2011; Vaughn & Saul, 2013). They “may not have easy access to resources in the community to support the development of curriculum (e.g., local library, or stores carrying classroom specific supplies)” (Hellsten et al., 2011, p. 14), nor to medical specialists for students, or professional/school consultants (McLean & Dixon, 2010). Additionally, feelings of professional isolation (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Jenkins Reitano, & Taylor, 2011) may arise with limited opportunities to network with and be mentored by other professionals (Goodpastor et al., 2012; Lock Budgen, Lunay, & Oakley, 2012).

Cost, time, and distances required for travel are also significant factors in accessing professional development (Jenkins et al., 2011; Miller & Graham, 2015). School district staff supporting rural schools may spend many unproductive hours driving to rural communities (Clarke et al., 2003). There are often insufficient substitute teachers to cover absences within the classroom, and little motivation to spend extended time away from family (Jenkins et al., 2011).

University and Initial Teacher Education Experiences of Rural and Indigenous Students

For rural students, initial teacher education often begins with a transition to an urban center to attend higher education. The transition involves adapting to changes in behaviour, norms, and culture (Tinto, 1988); adaptations that elicit “strong emotions of fear, nervousness, and surprise” (Ganss, 2016, p. 274). These emotions often arise from difficulties in making friends, feelings of loneliness and dissonance between rural/urban cultures (Guiffrida, 2008). Rural postsecondary students have expressed concerns that in attending university, and going against traditional beliefs that university was unnecessary and labour-type work within the community valued, they would lose their rural identity and become a different person who no longer fit in with their home community (Friesen & Purc-Stephanson, 2016). This identity loss may be compounded for rural Indigenous students, who lose access to their cultural traditions and heritage upon moving to urban centers to attend postsecondary institutions (Friesen & Purc-Stephanson, 2016).

Implications for teacher education programs arise from stories that Indigenous

students tell about what supports their success in postsecondary institutions. Pidgeon, Archibald, and Hawky (2014) explain that these students frequently emphasize the interconnections and relationships between themselves and their families, communities, nations, and geographical locations. This powerful sense of interconnection with people and place is key to understanding Aboriginal student persistence in acquiring a postsecondary education, from undergraduate studies on to graduate studies. (p. 2)

Initiatives to create these interconnections include peer and faculty mentoring initiatives, such as the Supporting Aboriginal Graduate Enhancement program or SAGE and the New Zealand Maori and Indigenous (MAI) graduate program (The University of Auckland, 2018). Both of these programs were designed to "...respond to the lack of presence of Indigeneity within universities and provide spaces in which Aboriginal students and faculty can come together to critically engage with ideas, theories, research processes, and lived experiences of being Indigenous within mainstream institutions" (Pidgeon et al., 2014, p. 9). Other examples of supports for Indigenous students at the university level include the creation of Aboriginal or Indigenous student centers that offer a meeting place, scheduled events, services, and programs that support students' social, cultural, academic, and personal needs (e.g., University of Saskatchewan's Aboriginal Students' Centre) (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. a). However, similar support programs do not seem to exist for rural students entering university programs in urban centers.

Preparation for Rural Teaching in Initial Teacher Education Programs

Adding to the challenges of fully engaging in an ITE program in an urban setting, teacher education programs tend to provide little preparation for teaching in rural settings (Green & Nolan, 2011). Reflecting a parallel theme in Canada, a 2008-2011 study revealed that the majority of Australian universities have "no explicit focus on rural education in their teacher education programs; have random and ad hoc rural practicum opportunities and no obvious link to any of the various financial incentives across Australia to encourage graduates to work in rural areas" (White Kline, Hastings, & Lock, 2011, p. iv). This has resulted in beginning teachers from urban contexts feeling inadequately prepared for the challenges of rural work and life (Young, Grainger & James, 2018).

Promising research has identified a connection between rural-focused teacher education programs/curriculum and teachers' perceptions of rural life and preparation to live and teach in rural communities (Green & Nolan, 2011; Young, Grainger, & James, 2018). Rural practicums (even a brief immersion experience) and reflective communities of practice during the practicums, have been found to positively influence pre-service teachers' attitudes regarding teaching in rural areas, and dispel urban misconceptions of rural teaching and living (e.g., from deficit views of rurality as a problem to overcome to a reconceptualised understanding of rich local knowledge and

the benefits of a close-knit community) (Adie & Barton, 2012; Hudson & Hudson, 2008; Young, Grainger & James, 2018). The Renewing Rural and Regional Teacher Education Curriculum (RRRTEC) was developed with modules addressing the identified needs: Experiencing rurality, community readiness, whole school focus, student learning and the classroom, and preparing for a rural career (RRRTEC, 2018); curriculum work that has been taken up by many Australian universities (White et al., 2011).

Methods

Five focus groups with 25 teachers and early childhood educators are the data sources (see Table 1 for information about participants). All but two participants grew up in rural communities (e.g., farming, mining and Indigenous communities).

Table 1.
Participants' Years of Experience and Teaching Positions

Province	Gender		Years teaching experience			Teaching position	
	Female	Male	1-9	10-19	20+	PreK-1	Admin/ Consultant
Alberta (n=6)**	5	1	1	3	2	5	1
Manitoba (n=5)**	5	0	1	3	1	3	2
Ontario (n=11)*	11	0	3	8	0	8	3
Saskatchewan (n=3)**	3	0	0	2	1	2	1
Totals	24	1	5	16	4	18	7

*Indigenous communities;

**Northern public school division.

Teachers were at a meeting in a central Canadian province as part of their participation in a four-province six-year action research project taking place in northern rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Two co-investigators and three postdoctoral fellows facilitated the focus groups. The following focus group questions were created to encourage participants' elaboration on their experiences and perceptions of rural teaching and living:

1. Please tell us about what it's like living in your community.
2. Tell us about your teacher education. What was it like moving to the city for it? If you are from an urban area, what was it like to move to this community? What stands out for you as the big differences between the two?
3. Talk about your professional development opportunities - how does teaching in your rural community influence what you can access?
4. Talk about your teaching responsibilities and how they may have

changed over the years. Talk about any extracurricular responsibilities you have.

5. Talk about life in your community as a teacher. Do you have roles in your community that extend beyond your teaching responsibilities?

With the consent of the participants, the focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. There were 128 pages of transcripts.

Analysis was inductive, as we identified meaningful units (key words, phrases and sentences) and then developed codes to describe what related units had in common (Braun & Clark, 2006). We all analyzed two transcripts and then met to compare/contrast our individual coding. We identified and discussed rationales for differences that arose. Once consensus was reached, one author went on to use the codes to analyze the remaining three transcripts.

Findings

Characteristics of Rural Schools and Rural Living

Participants highlighted the significance of the natural world, types of relationships among community members, and availability of services and resources when describing their rural communities.

Natural World is Significant to Rural Living and Teaching

Proximity to the natural world was identified by participants as a feature of rural living. One teacher said: “It’s just a lot of open space and flat land and bush, or bear country. So all I would see from home to school would be farms, cattle, and green. So it’s definitely rural”. Another teacher described her community as “definitely rural” because “you’re surrounded by a lake and swamp. There’s nothing else”. Examples of everyday encounters with the natural world were provided, as voiced by one participant: “It’s totally rural. Like my kids got off the school bus and there were bears in the yard.”

Participants talked about rural life as involving outdoor activities in the natural world. One participant said, “I love the water and you can go in any direction and find a lake within twenty minutes of my home. And there are so many opportunities to hunt, to fish, to camp, to do all sorts of water sports or go for a quad ride in any direction. And stop and visit or look for animals.”

Indigenous values were highlighted as part of living in proximity to the natural world. One participant asserted:

It’s so important for children to love the earth. The only way they can is to experience it, to touch it, to smell it, to play with it, to lay there and listen to it. I think when we teach our children to love nature, they’ll care for it and they’ll be advocates for it. I’ve had kids that can’t sit and can’t hold

a pencil, can't colour. They're hard to discipline inside a classroom. But when they go outside, they are a totally different kid, and they are engaged and never need discipline.

Limited Access to Services and Resources

In participants' views, the reality of living in northern rural communities was that they lived a significant distance from services and resources and paid inflated prices for goods. One participant explained: "We have to drive like 50 miles to a decent-sized place that has Costco and those types of stores. So it was definitely rural". Another participant exaggerated her situation but made a point about the high cost of living in Northern rural communities: "It's eight dollars for a jug of milk." Her use of hyperbole evoked laughter from fellow focus group members but her point was made. Indigenous teachers described the available services in their communities: "There are not very many options for stores and it is still five hours...to a major city center. They talked about bulk-ordering food to come on the "barge [which] comes in every summer... That's how they get goods to our community."

The resource scarcity includes medical services and access to secondary education, particularly in participating Indigenous teachers' communities. As one teacher explained: "The doctor comes in once in a while and even the nurses rotate biweekly. A dentist comes in once in a while, too." Additionally, with a lack of high schools in remote Indigenous communities, some participants had had to leave the community in order to further their education past the elementary level. They talked about staying in "boarding homes—strangers' houses that will board students... You couldn't just go home on weekends. You could only go home at Christmas." Participating teachers from Indigenous communities explained that they must prepare their students not only for high school curriculum content, but also life skills. One participating Indigenous teacher told a story about taking a student to an urban area to go to high school:

He had never been outside of the community and he was thirteen years old. We took him to McDonalds for the first time. So like the different things that you have to teach. Coming from rural to urban, you have to teach life skills. How do you order off of a menu? What does that learning have to look like?

Feeling of Togetherness

Participants portrayed their communities as close-knit, family-friendly and family/oriented, and supportive. They commonly mentioned community living being "all about the relationships", where "everybody knows everybody." One participant explained: "There's a genuine connection between people which I really enjoy." The communities were described as "very trusting" and "safe". One participant explained: "I send my children out to play...but I don't worry about them. I know that there's eyes all over town, I'll find them at the end of the day, they will come home. You know, they play hockey on the street, they play soccer, they build forts. So it is very safe."

Participants noted that there were frequent family-friendly events organized in rural communities. One teacher explained: “The community puts an event on. They have to work together to create...events for everybody to enjoy. . . And when there is a crisis, everyone comes together...If there’s a funeral in the family, people are dropping food off and they’re supporting [the family].” The list of events included: fishing derbies, pot lucks, fundraisers, Bingo, music festivals, annual float plane festival, and a Cree Fest. One participant provided a description:

We have a Cree Fest. They do all kinds of activities there. And whoever wants to go, they send like big planes to our community to fly over...so people can go and have fun...They play Bingo, games and everything. And then the following year, there’ll be another community having the Cree Fest... Then all of us will go there. It’s like that every year...It’s families getting together...And we speak Cree.

Rural communities were also described as being “supportive” where people “help out each other more.” One Indigenous participant said:

Families help other families. Some the elders, after they’ve hunted, will go and take some meat and drop it off. Because they are aware of what’s going on around them in the community. People take care of other people’s children...When the mothers are struggling, lots of grandmas raise and take care of the children and older siblings.

Teaching in Rural Communities

Participants identified challenges and advantages to teaching in northern rural communities, as detailed below.

Inconsistent Access to Resources

Focus group participants talked about a lack of resources, particularly in schools in Indigenous communities. One participant explained: “For us to drive in to an urban center for PD, it’s five and a half hours. . . So you’ve got to take that extra day to travel it and the extra day to travel back, unless it happens to fall on a weekend where you have to use your personal time.” This travel, whether it was to bring in a speaker or for teachers to travel to urban centers, involved prohibitive costs. In addition, many rural communities lack supply staff and teachers are reluctant to leave their students knowing that colleagues will have to cover for them.

Participants noted that their staff and school divisions provided creative ways of accessing professional learning opportunities (e.g., professional learning communities, curriculum coaches, rotating professional development attendance/presentation of content to colleagues, distance education). For example, one Indigenous participant

stated: “The Tribal Councils will fly all the education staff to [the nearest city] to receive one week of training for TAs, teachers, and principals.” Schools have also established professional learning communities of teacher “cohort groups”. These groups read and discussed articles, and observed each others’ practice. Other schools “rotate teachers”, taking turns going to various conferences and presenting the information to the staff. Similarly, curriculum coaches are hired “to go to every conference and they bring back what’s research-based, what they would like to see in the classrooms.”

In one participant’s school, community members support educators by running a sports program. She explained: “Once a month, the kids will get to have a whole afternoon of outdoor games. Right now they’re doing like skating skills, skipping, volleyball...And that gives us half a day once a month for professional learning communities. That gives us the opportunity to work as a team.” Participants also continued their professional learning through online courses, video conference sessions, teleconferencing, and Massive Online Open Courses. These were viewed as helpful in solving access challenges. However, the uneven internet connections within some communities, particularly the Indigenous communities, mitigated the success of online learning in resolving access problems.

Teachers are Members of the Community whose Role Extends Beyond Classroom Teaching

All participants echoed what one teacher said, “I know the children, I know the community, I know their parents.” The belonging and “...connectedness...that’s a really nice feeling,” as summed up by one participant. Participants observed that by living and teaching in a small town “you can form deeper relationships with parents and kids.” These relationships and in-depth knowledge provided them with insight and understanding into their students’ lives:

And then just knowing...when kids come [to school] and things aren’t going well for them...you know kind of what’s going on, they were at the rink late, or somebody was sick, or...passed away...then you already know they need some extra love and attention that day.

Another teacher appreciated the long-term relationships she had developed with community members. She explained, “You get to be a part of their family, as a teacher in a small community. You do get to experience the children as they grow up. They still check in with you. You build long-lasting relationships with the children that you teach and the families that you interact with.” One participant talked about how “parents see that you are invested in that community, the same community that they live in. So I think you gain from that.” These relationships were viewed as reciprocal. Participants noted that their communities were very supportive of the schools. Community members willingly came to the school to teach cultural components (e.g., archery, ban-

nock making, story-telling, drumming, dancing). Other communities were described as being "...very generous to our education system and when we're fundraising, they provide things for that and support for different field trips and things."

To illustrate the close integration of teachers into their rural communities, one participant told this story: "Last week we walked to the library, it's two blocks away. As you're walking, you're waving to everybody as they're driving down the street. 'Oh, we know them.' And as you're walking, the kids say, 'Oh there's your house. There's my house.' And all the kids know where I live." Indeed, one participant, who lived close to the school, opened the door when the doorbell rang after school one day to find her students inviting her out to play with them!

Teachers' relationships with community members were viewed by participants as an extension of the important role that schools play in rural communities. Some spoke of the advantages of this, such as being looked to as a positive role model and leader. Participants often help out at community events, such as working at the concessions booth at the recreation center on weekends." Being a rural teacher,

...really is an extension into your own life, which a lot of people don't understand. Sometimes you'll get community members calling your own private line to say, "Oh we needed to borrow the projector for this Saturday's Remembrance Day service. Could you please run back to the school and unlock it for me so I can pick it up?" You aren't going to last in our community very long, if you're always going to constantly pull out the policy book and say, "Well, it says right here in my job description, I don't need to do that." ...well, you could do that and then...the ties would be cut because people wouldn't be having that positive interaction any more.

Focus group participants perceived that in their northern rural schools, teachers have more responsibilities, teach a greater number/variety of courses, have flexible teaching assignments, and take on many additional roles in the school than do their counterparts in urban schools. Due to the size of staff, teachers reported taking on additional roles, such as acting principal, school-home liaison coordinators (e.g., "Spaghetti Day every three months to encourage parent involvement), And transportation chaperones (e.g., "We have drivers to take the kids to and from our Aboriginal Head Start, but we take turns riding in each van"). Participants discussed extracurricular responsibilities such as coaching (e.g., basketball, volleyball, hockey), leading clubs and community committees (e.g., drama club for children and the community's dinner theatre planning committee), and work in a community garden. Educators noted that, "...if you want your...students to have those opportunities, then you would take on a lot more of those jobs as well because who else is going to do them for them?"

Initial Teacher Education Experiences

The focus group participants shared stories of the adjustments they had to make when moving to urban centers to complete their teacher education degrees and the tensions they experienced leaving home.

Adjusting to Urban Life

Recalling the move to the city for initial teacher education, participants identified feelings of being lonely and feeling outside their “comfort zone”. As one participant reported: “I came from a small, little, close-knit community, where you knew everyone. And I went to university and didn’t know a soul. I was very lonely. People weren’t as friendly, and a lot of people from the cities had their friends and they had their groups.” Adjustment to city living was a common theme. One participant revealed, “... it was the noise, the people. And I wasn’t used to the food. Like everything... Because [growing up] I was basically in my community all the time. I never really left.” Participants also reported how they had to learn new skills to live in an urban environment. One teacher stated:

I had never ridden a city bus, I had never taken a taxi, I had never read a city map to figure out how to get from point A to point B. Now you’re living in an apartment on your own and you have to pay your own bills. We never took anything like that in school. My Mom took me in with the truck-load of what I had. And she said, “We’ll see you at Christmas time”...And so it was a major adjustment.

In addition, several of the participants perceived a “values clash” when they moved to attend university in the city; one where their rural values were judged to be inferior to those of their urban peers. As one participant shared, “I felt like the way they acted and welcomed us was: ‘You kids are rural and we’re city, so we’re better.’” Others felt they were also being judged by their university professors as being “not as sophisticated as the urban students. Our professors made it clear that they thought we had strange values.” These feelings of being judged were also often accompanied by feelings that they were turning their back on their home and way of life by leaving for university, as elaborated in the next section.

Tensions in Leaving and Returning Home

Participants discussed the tensions involved in leaving their rural community to attend university. They agreed that the perceptions of the role of education in a young person’s life in their rural communities often did not include university degrees. Several participants noted that the educational goal in their community was “As long as you finish high school, that’s good enough”. Those who grew up in northern rural communities questioned both their capabilities at completing university degrees and

the feasibility of taking this path:

Well, sometimes for us in the North, we didn't believe we could go to university. And we were told by educators and different people, too, that it would probably be wise to just go get a job and start your family. I was told, "You don't need that." Or people said that it's not doable.: 'University is too much. It's just too much of a commitment for you to do. It costs too much money. Who's going to help you? Where are you going to stay?' They put a lot of barriers up.

Rather than encouraging young people to go to university, it was common for family members to promote the trades. Participants from mining communities said, "The boys went into trades and they would...go into the mine. And their parents kind of fostered them into those."

Additionally, participants described community/family pressure to return to their communities after completing their postsecondary degrees in urban centers. They described a "pull towards going back home" because "the community and the family want to keep the family close. We weren't encouraged to [go] too far and explore."

In addition, feelings of responsibility/accountability were also identified by participants. As one teacher explained, "There's a lot of responsibility on my shoulders that I was now representing the family. I was the one that had gone out and done all this education and so now I was the one who was supposed to make it, keep the family proud of me." Individuals were being held accountable to be role models for their siblings and other community members. However, upon returning home several participants were told that they had "changed" (e.g., "What did the university do to you? I don't even know you any more"). These individuals were often treated differently and/or teased (e.g., "Oh that city girl").

Not all participants found the move to an urban or rural community difficult. Some participants felt they "had the support, and that everything was good." Others noted that they successfully transitioned from a rural community to a smaller urban community by attending a smaller community college before attending "the huge mainstream university," or by being a member of a small teacher education cohort such as those found in the Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program (SUNTEP) (University of Saskatchewan, 2018) and the Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP) (University of Saskatchewan, n.d. b). As one participant shared, change is "just a new experience," and going to new places and meeting new people can be "rejuvenating and kind of exciting."

Discussion and Implications

Teaching in Northern Rural and Indigenous Schools

Themes arising from our analysis of the focus group discussions reinforce find-

ings of studies conducted in rural communities in other countries. As did rural teachers in previous research, participating teachers and early childhood educators expressed an appreciation of their rural lifestyles and their proximity to the natural world (Jenkins et al., 2011; Lock et al., 2012; Spring, 2013). They portrayed their professional and community lives in terms of active reciprocal relationships with their students' families and the community as a whole. Participants valued close relationships with individual community members and at the same time, they recognized the public role of rural teachers; one that extended beyond the expectations of classroom teaching. They also identified a paradox, characteristic of findings of previous research, of receiving support from students' parents while at the same time, feeling a lack of access to support from mentors and other professionals (Berry & Gravelle, 2013; Miller & Graham, 2015).

Participants provided examples of how the challenges of teaching in rural schools (e.g., professional isolation, lack of resources and professional development opportunities), that have been found repeatedly in previous research in other countries (Burton & Johnson, 2010; Goodpastor et al., 2012; Hellsten et al., 2011, Lock et al., 2012; Preston, 2006), are exacerbated in northern rural and Indigenous Canadian communities because of the huge distances, and in some Indigenous communities, the need to fly or drive on winter roads to get to urban centers. Participants gave examples of ways in which school and school division administrators followed practices recommended by previous researchers (e.g., Clarke et al., 2003; Goodpastor et al., 2012; Jenkins et al., 2011; Miller & Graham, 2015). They had used instructional technology and allocated large sums of money to fund travel for teachers' professional development in an effort to overcome the limitations of available professional development opportunities in their northern communities. They had also embraced our university-school partnership project with its goal of using teacher-led action research to support teacher learning and students' oral language and writing (see Author for more information about this project).

Initial Teacher Education Programs Supporting Rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous Students

The rural to urban transition of students in initial teacher education programs has not received as much attention as the transition of urban-based beginning teachers to rural teaching (e.g., Gilbert, 1995). As participants in our research have detailed, initial teacher education programs often fail to recognize the demands and challenges facing northern rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous teacher education students, both in daily lived experience as postsecondary students and in the dominant values and perspectives of their initial teacher education programs.

Initiatives to ease the transition for Indigenous students include the establishment of tribal colleges in the United States (Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2010), and alterna-

tive online B.Ed. programs for Indigenous students at mainstream universities. These colleges and programs have been created in consultation with Indigenous educators and community leaders in recognition of the need to maintain Indigenous cultures and languages (e.g., Brock University, 2018; University of Saskatchewan, 2018).

To support students with rural backgrounds who may or may not be Indigenous, initial teacher education programs might also offer a greater array of distance learning courses and opportunities to carry out practicums in rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. University-secondary school partnerships might provide experiences, perhaps through weekend programs on campus, for rural students to become acquainted with urban life and expectations and experiences as students in postsecondary institutions. Greater efforts to second rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers to teach curriculum and instruction courses in initial teacher education programs would ensure that faculty who are familiar with these students' experiences and challenges can mentor and support them. These teachers could serve as consultants to initial teacher education programs regarding ways to address the tensions experienced when rural students must leave home to attend initial teacher education programs; often with the knowledge that they would be unable to return to work in these communities because of the dearth of postsecondary-educated positions there (McDonough, Evely Gildersleeve, & McClafferty Jarsky, 2010). Additionally, these seconded teachers might work with initial teacher education program faculty and administrators to create safe spaces for reframing views of what it means to be a teacher. These conversations would allow for questioning and offering of alternatives to deficit perspectives on rural and Indigenous knowledge and experiences within educational research, practice and policy. Given the abundance of ways in which participating rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers feel that their professional and personal lives are enriched by teaching in their northern rural communities, these alternative perspectives may enhance and enrich dominant, urban-oriented perspectives on teaching and roles of teachers, as well.

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