Student Engagement in Otter Nelson River School: Implications for Cree Culture, Traditions and Cree Language

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Abstract

This study presents the results of a study that was introduced at last year’s Graduate Student Symposium, but at which time had not been completed. The purpose of the study was to examine how the educational services provided by Otter Nelson River School can be designed and improved to foster student engagement in school programs. A second purpose was to ask students about their perceptions of the necessity of teaching and maintaining Cree culture, traditions and language as a means of supporting their success. Three recent graduates of the years of 2011, 2013 and 2014 were interviewed for this study. Interviews with students were conducted at a place and time convenient to participants, and lasted for no more than one hour. The findings of the study will be presented at the symposium. Implications for the improvement learning conditions through the use of cultural pedagogy (Battiste, 2002) at Otter Nelson River School will be presented. Findings support the need for literacy development and continued language and cultural programming (Battiste, Kovach, & Balzer, 2010).

Otter Nelson River (ONR) School accommodates approximately 1200 students in Nursery/Kindergarten, Grades 1-4, and the Senior Years (Grades 9-12). ONR has one principal, two vice-principals, three school counselors, four resource teachers, one parental worker and 50 teachers including those in the specialty areas. ONR also has 40 paraprofessionals who work with special needs students (Cross Lake Education Authority, 2014).

Educational service provision includes a blend of culture, tradition and technology. School programs are an extension of this family-based education. The Cross Lake Education Authority believes that, through respect for personal freedom, children will learn all they need to know in order to live a good life. Our elders had a vision of what makes a good life in this world: strength, wisdom, courage and vision are the result of:
- Pride in one’s self;
- Understanding one’s fellowmen, and;
- Living in harmony with nature.

Our education must respect and encompass our language, our history, our land, nature and all our resources (Cross Lake Education Authority, 2014). To that end, our school must be holistic and realistic in outlook. It must support students’ academic development, but also their spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical growth (Barrett, 2010). It also must respect Indigenous knowledge and the role of community elders in facilitating the preservation of our culture and heritage (Ball, 2004) The Cross Lake Education Authority is specifically committed to the awareness and preservation of native culture and language in Cross Lake (Cross Lake Education Authority, 2014).
References


