Outsider Teacher/Insider Knowledge:
Fostering Mohawk Cultural Competency for Non-Native Teachers

By Sharon Vegh Williams

Introduction

Research has suggested that mainstream teachers, and the institutions they work for, are often disconnected from the language, culture, and approaches to learning that facilitate Native students' achievement in school (Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Klug & Hall, 2002; Lomawaima, 2001; Pewewardy, 2002; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002; Tharp, 2006). Yet, while the overall Native population has increased over the past few decades, the number of Native teachers has decreased (Writer & Chavez, 2002). As a result, many Native students will be taught by non-Native teachers with limited training in cultural competency. Cultural competency in this context refers to teachers' knowledge of and ability to incorporate their students' cultural, social, and linguistic backgrounds into curriculum and instruction (Banks et al., 2005).

A number of prior studies have identified some of the barriers and challenges Native students have confronted in mainstream school settings (Cleary & Peacock, 1997; Deyhle & Swisher, 1997; Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002). In this study, the cultural divide between mainstream teachers and the Mohawk community is examined as a group of Mohawk and non-Native educators collaborated on the development of a cultural competency professional development program.

Sharon Vegh Williams is an adjunct instructor in the School of Education at the State University of New York at Potsdam, Potsdam, New York.

Similar to other school districts serving Native students, all of the classroom teachers and administrators in this study in Farmingdale, New York[1] are non-Native. Farmingdale is a reservation border town district with a rapidly growing Mohawk student population, having increased 500% over the last decade. Further, the Native student population is projected to continue growing at a similar rate (Chief Donald Coolidge, Group Meeting, November 18, 2008). Despite the growing Native student population and the persistent cultural divide between faculty and students, Farmingdale has provided limited professional development opportunities on Mohawk cultural competency for the non-Native staff. Members of the Farmingdale Native American Resource Program, who had recently been hired by the district, believed the lack of professional development on this issue was problematic for Native students and families (Field Notes, December 4, 2007).

The American Council on Education found that Native students "exhibit the highest dropout rates, the lowest academic performance rates, and the lowest college admission and retention rates in the nation" (Grande, 2004, p. 5). Similar to national statistics, Mohawk students in the Farmingdale Central School District scored lower on standardized measures of achievement when compared with their non-Native counterparts (The New York State District Report Card, 2006-2007). In 2007, for example, Farmingdale district's Grade 5 English Language Arts assessment reports that 0% of Native students scored at the highest level compared with 7% of White students. On that same assessment, 50% of Farmingdale's Native students performed in the top two levels compared with 70% of White students.

The lower standardized test scores among Native students remain relatively constant throughout the grade levels in Farmingdale. For instance, the results of the 2007 secondary-level English assessment indicate that 18% of Native students performed at the highest level compared with 37% of White students. On that same assessment, 55% of Native students scored in the highest two levels compared with 72% of White students. Further, The New York State Comprehensive Information Report from 2001-2002 reported a 36% drop out rate for Native students in Farmingdale compared with 17% for White students (The New York State District Report Card, 2006-2007).

Historically, education for Native students and associated federal and state policies promoted a blatant and intentional degradation of Native culture (Adams, 1995; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2006; Reyhner, 1992). The Indian Nations at Risk task force in 1991 found that the legacies of past educational policies continued to have a negative impact on schooling for Native American children (Lipka & McCarty, 1994). These legacies include the presentation of information from a European perspective, low teacher expectations, deficit orientation towards Native communities, disconnection from tribal teachings by elders, and the lack of access for meaningful community participation.

To date, widespread efforts to modify curriculum and instruction in schools serving Native students have taken place very infrequently (Freng, Freng, & Moore,

2007; Reyhner & Jacobs, 2002). A 2005 National Colloquium aimed at improving the academic performance of Native Americans documented a very limited number of culturally based educational programs currently serving Native students (Beaulieu, 2006; McCardle & Demmert, 2006). While recruiting Native teachers is an invaluable part of the solution, educating non-Native teachers in cultural competency is also essential (Beaulieu, 2006; Howard, 2006).

Unfortunately, limited research documents efforts to prepare mainstream teachers to better meet the needs of their Native students. School districts tend to provide inadequate professional development in cultural competency for the populations being served (Reyhner, 1992). As a result, many long held, negative beliefs go unquestioned in current school practice. In their review of research, Deyhle and Swisher (1997) found that, "the assimilationist goals of the boarding school era are still evident in teachers' beliefs, pedagogy, and curricula" (p. 116). While challenges exist in creating effective professional development, well-developed programs have been shown to help establish more trusting relationships between schools and Native communities (Lipka & McCarty, 1994; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). University and school-based programs in cultural competency need to be expanded to meet student needs.

The primary goal of this research was to study the interactions between Native and non-Native participants as they worked to create a professional development program for the district. The points of conflict and contention were then used as a platform for addressing the issues through teacher education. In the study, the terms Native and Native American were selected because they are the most commonly used terms the literature and by the participants. Haudenosaunee refers to the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy including Mohawk and Onondaga. The terms non-Native and mainstream refer to teachers who represent the dominant culture. By uncovering Native and non-Native stakeholders' perspectives, four general areas of conflict between the communities were found including: contrasting conceptions of cultural competency, cultural disconnect, intercultural miscommunication, and issues of trust. Through uncovering and analyzing these areas of conflict, a model of cultural competency professional development intended for the Farmingdale District with implications for other schools serving Native students was developed.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, Tribal Critical Race Theory in Education (TribalCrit) was used as a framework for analyzing the interaction between Native and non-Native participants. TribalCrit framed a vision in which Native education could and should be moving as articulated by Native scholars and the Mohawk Tribal Education Committee (Brayboy, 2005; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003; Smith, 1999). Further, TribalCrit provides an analysis of the many issues confronting Native communities in schooling including "language shift and language loss…the lack of students graduating

from colleges and universities, and the overrepresentation of American Indians in special education" (Brayboy, 2005). Deyhle (1995) suggests that maintaining cultural identity furthers academic success for Native students. However, despite the social and academic benefit, culturally inclusive schooling continues to be disregarded and dismissed in federal educational policy (Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002b). TribalCrit calls attention to the inherent colonialist and assimilationist agenda in current school practice.

TribalCrit outlines the manner in which Native-centered and mainstream education work together to support individual and collective achievement. The emphasis on both academic and cultural knowledge also matches how many Native communities, including the Mohawk in Akwesasne, envision their children's educational needs (Lafrance, 1995). Specifically, TribalCrit articulates three aspects of self-education for survivance (Brayboy, 2005). Survivance is defined as a combination of survival and resistance which articulates Native aspirations of upholding cultural continuity in a racist and colonialist society (Vizenor & Lee, 1999). Cultural knowledge refers to the understanding of tribal cultural norms and practices. Knowledge of survival is the ability to adapt and move forward on the community and individual level. Academic knowledge is what is learned in formal school settings. Through the lens of TribalCrit, education should teach students how to bring together traditional notions of culture and knowledge with western/European conceptions "in order to actively engage in survivance, self-determination, and tribal autonomy" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 437).

Native people and communities inhabit a transitional place in their racial and political identities. Brayboy (2005) states "We are often placed between our joint statuses as legal/political and racialized beings" (p. 432). He argues that most Native people view this dual conception with an emphasis on the legal and political. This includes Native demands for tribal sovereignty, self-identification and the right to self-determination. (Lomawaima, 2001; Mohawk, 1998). Mainstream society, however, tends to view Native Americans only within the frame of ethnicity. Fully understanding the importance of Native peoples' political stance, however, might help researchers to better analyze the relationship between Native communities and educational institutions. How then, does TribalCrit contribute to understanding of the problem of non-Native educators' lack of Native culturally competency? Overall, TribalCrit clearly articulates Native communities' perspectives and provides researchers and educators with a new framework for analyzing the conflict between Native students and non-Native teachers and institutions.

Outsider Researcher: Building Community Partnerships

I was drawn to this research from my own experience as a non-Native teacher on the Navajo Nation for four years. In retrospect, I was unprepared to meet the needs of my Navajo students due to my lack of cultural competency training. Further, I

was unable to fully recognize the cultural strengths the students brought with them to the learning environment. Similar to most schools serving Native students, the majority of the teaching staff in this New Mexico public school was non-Native. In addition, the deficit paradigm was the general and unspoken assumption towards the communities' cultural ways of knowing. Only after becoming familiar with the research on Native education, was I able to make sense of my own complicit role in the destructive legacy of schooling for Native students.

As I was relocating to Northern New York, neighboring the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne, it seemed like a fitting opportunity to address and rectify my own shortcomings as a non-Native teacher of Native students. After informally meeting and speaking with local educators and community members, it seemed that the reservation border towns might be an appropriate site for exploring the research issues in which I was interested. I later met with both the tribal and school district leadership suggesting a collaborative action research study that would develop a culturally relevant professional development program. Both the district and the tribe were interested in furthering professional development opportunities in Farmingdale, but had not had the resources, time or personnel to pursue this important issue.

Facilitating the development of trusting relationships between participants and working towards group consensus was central to the study design and data collection process. The process of inquiry outlined below emphasized a non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the participants and within the participant group. These values of respect and equity are more aligned with traditional Mohawk norms (Santiago-Rivera, Morse, Hunt, & Lickers, 1998). One of the central features of participatory action research is a shift of the locus of control from the academic researcher to the participants. Although the insider/outsider perspective remains, the researcher plays the role of a reciprocal collaborator (Herr & Anderson, 2005). The following section describes the nature of building respectful relationships in this study.

Through collaborating with the Mohawk community at Akwesasne, a respectful and honest stance regarding the outsider researcher's positionality was established. Much has been written about the non-Native researcher's role in research involving Native communities (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Eder, 2007; Lambe & Swamp, 2002; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002a; Mihesuah, 1998; Santiago-Rivera, et al., 1998). In this study, the research was collaboratively negotiated with the Farmingdale Native American Resource Program members and the Tribal Education Council at Akwesasne led by Chief Donald Coolidge to ensure that the community goals remained at the forefront.

In addition to community members being involved at all levels of the research, the literature suggests that Native stakeholders should oversee and approve of projects to ensure that outcomes serve the community's needs (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Eder, 2007; Lambe & Swamp, 2002; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002a; Santiago-Rivera, et al., 1998; Smith, 1999). In fact, the Mohawk Nation at Akwesasne requires

any potential research project to go through an internal review process for approval (Santiago-Rivera, et al., 1998; Swisher, 1998). Smith (1999) describes the Native research agenda as not only meeting validity standards, but also meeting usefulness standards. In other words, researchers working with Native communities need to be able to answer questions about why they are conducting the research and who will benefit from the results (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000; Garroutte, 2001).

Meeting usefulness standards was a guiding principle for this project. Smith (1999) describes an empowering outcomes model, which addresses questions important to the Native community and works towards tangible and beneficial outcomes. This model involves "both indigenous and non-indigenous researchers working on a project and shaping that project together…research needs to be carefully negotiated, and the outcomes of research need to be thought through before the research is undertaken" (Smith, 1999, p. 178). In this collaborative action research project, incorporating these criteria set forth by Native scholars was prioritized.

Research Design and Methodology

The complexity of capturing nuanced, multiple perspectives in this project necessitated the use of a qualitative data collection methodology while the goal of challenging and improving existing social structures dictated a participatory action research model. Herr and Anderson (2005) describe how, "action research takes place in settings that reflect a society characterized by conflicting values and an unequal distribution of power and resources" (p. 4). This model of inquiry seeks sustained institutional change. This methodological stance mirrors TribalCrit's emphasis on the responsibility of researchers to work towards concrete changes in schooling for Native students (Brayboy, 2005).

In this study, qualitative methodologies were utilized to analyze the cultural disconnect between the Farmingdale schools and the Mohawk community. Farmingdale is a relatively small, rural district with one high school. The vast majority of the teaching staff is from the area (Focus Group, November 4, 2008). Mohawk participants described a historical tension along cultural lines between the communities (Participant Interview, July 14, 2008). The Mohawk staff also noted a continued sense of mistrust on the part of many Mohawk parents towards the Farmingdale schools. One of the staff members stated that parents often come to the school "with a wall up" because they don't fully trust the school system. On the other side, the staff members also felt that some of the teachers in Farmingdale had prejudiced attitudes towards the Mohawk community (Field Notes, May 7, 2007). The contrasting, and possibly contentious relationship between the school district and the Mohawk community called for a qualitative, descriptive approach to research.

Because interpretive research seeks to uncover the variability in relationships, issues such as cross-cultural communication in schooling may be better addressed through this lens. Therefore, data in this study was collected through multiple quali-

tative methods such as interviewing, participant observation, qualitative surveys, focus groups, and document analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Seidman, 1998). The multiple data collection strategies are outlined in the chart in Figure 1.

For this research project, eight study participants volunteered for the collaborative group to develop the district's professional development program. All four members of the Farmingdale Native American Resource Program volunteered to participate. All four members of the Native American Resource Program are Haudenosaunee. The members of the Native American Resource Program were identified through administrative referral. The four members of the Native American Resource Program recruited non-Native classroom teachers through informational letters. Four non-Native teachers volunteered to participate. The eight collaborative group members participated in six group meeting sessions over the course of six months facilitated and guided by the researcher. The collaborative group also shared responsibility for making research decisions such as designing a qualitative survey later distributed to 140 teachers in the school district. Fifty-two surveys were returned. At a later session, the researcher and the eight participants analyzed the survey results. The researcher and Native participants also conducted a focus group with Native American parents in the district.

As noted above, mainstream teachers' perspectives were explored through interview and participant observation data. The data also helped to frame how Native educators, non-Native teachers, and Native parents viewed the many challenges confronting Mohawk students. Participant observation data from the meeting with the Tribal Education Committee supported tribal sovereignty and rights of Native

Figure 1
Data Collection Methods

Data Collection Method	Rationale for Method
Participant observation and field notes	Insight into complex and layered relationships in a natural setting
Interviews with Native and non-Native participants	Nuanced understanding of issues from participants' perspective
Document analysis of participants' journals	Understanding of issues from participants' perspective
Focus group with Native American parent committee	Community's perspective on the need for culturally inclusive schooling
Qualitative survey of district's faculty	Non-threatening way for mainstream teachers to voice their perspectives
Document analysis of professional development program	Understand participants' vision for teacher cultural competency

self-determination (Field Notes, January 14, 2009). In addition, document analysis data from the culminating professional development program was framed within aspects of survivance including the integration of academic and Mohawk cultural knowledge (Brayboy, 2005).

Grounded theory was used as an initial method of data collection and analysis. Grounded theory relies on the constant comparative method, joint coding and analytic induction to build theory from the data itself rather than from preconceived hypotheses (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). Grounded theory is defined as the "simultaneous involvement in data collection and analysis" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). While employing the initial grounded theory techniques, the data were sorted into salient categories and themes to explore meaning through relationships (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973). This process then provided direction for future data gathering. The process was data driven in that early data informed the direction of later data collection. Throughout the process, journals, field notes and memos linked the data to related broader issues (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). This detailed level of analysis was used to discover new concepts and relationships in order to build theory. All data was sorted and categorized with the aid of the NVivo8 (http://www.qsrinternational.com). As a software analysis program, NVivo8 helps to sort, classify, and arrange large quantities of qualitative data.

Findings

The most prominent theme that emerged through the research was how the broader cultural conflicts on the macroscopic, community-wide level were manifested and enacted through our participant group dynamic on the micro level. In a sense, the collaborative group was a microcosm allowing the researcher and participants to analyze the conflicts that arise in the greater Akwesasne and Farmingdale school community. One Native participant, Johnnie, reflected on his experience growing up in Akwesasne and the history of "tension" between the communities that created a "big divide between Akwesasne and Farmingdale" (Participant Interview, July 25, 2008). Although the cross-cultural tensions were not present in every interaction, in many ways, discord and lack of trust characterized the group dynamic. Specifically, four areas of conflict between the communities emerged through the analysis including; contrasting conceptions of cultural competency, cultural disconnect, intercultural miscommunication, and issues of trust.

The participants' views also evolved during and as a result of the group discussions and interactions throughout the study. In the data analysis, the evolution of participants' cross-cultural understandings was categorized along a model entitled the Developmental Trajectory of Understanding (see Figure 2). The five stages along this model include: the emergent stage, the acknowledgement stage, the receptivity stage, the sharing stage, and two-way meaningful dialogue. These stages will be further described in the section below. This model was based on data analysis from

the Farmingdale study in conjunction with related work in the research literature (Klug & Whitfield, 2003; Pewewardy, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 1980; Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Contrasting Conceptions of Cultural Competency

Native and non-Native participants held different positions regarding the goals of Mohawk cultural competency. Specifically, Native participants wanted their distinct culture and cultural orientation acknowledged and validated in mainstream schooling. The non-Native participants held a range of views on the need for Mohawk cultural competency as articulated in the qualitative teacher survey. The majority of non-Native teachers, 77 percent, expressed their desire to know more but weren't sure how to access the information. Four percent of teachers believed the inclusion of cultural competency training was interesting, but viewed it as an "add-on" to their overburdened workloads. Fifteen percent of teachers objected to the inclusion of culture knowledge because they believed it prioritized Native students over mainstream students. Four percent of Farmingdale teachers believed the inclusion of cultural competency was irrelevant to the learning process (Qualitative Teacher Surveys).

From a Mohawk perspective, Johnnie explained, "We have all these people come back educated… But, you also need your chiefs- your traditional chiefs, your clan mothers, your faith keepers, and all that too." He stated further, that Mohawk students confront additional barriers in the Farmingdale District because they come from a

Figure 2
Developmental Trajectory of Understanding
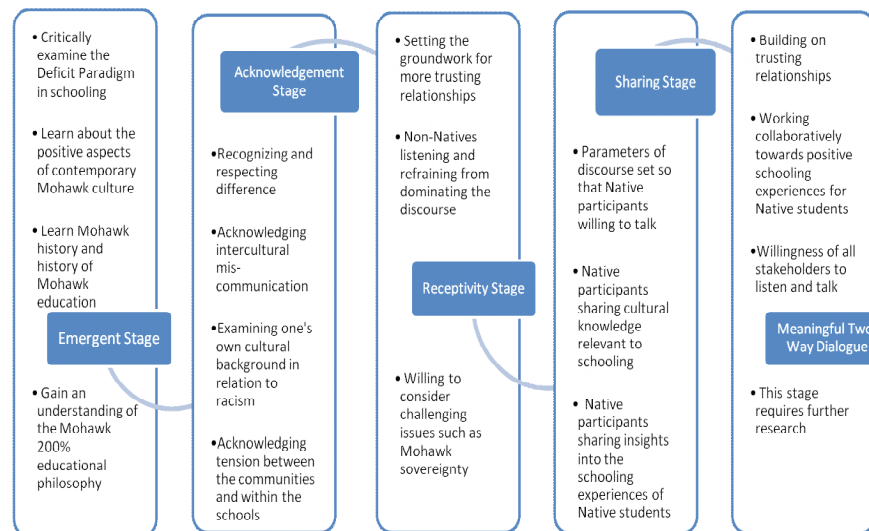
"different community, different lifestyle, and maybe their views go against every-thing here, most everything. You know, the bigger issues of sovereignty" (Participant Interview, July 25, 2008). In this excerpt, Johnnie articulates the dual emphasis on traditional and mainstream education in support of tribal self-determination.

Nineteen percent of the non-Native teachers surveyed, on the other hand, asserted that no substantive differences existed between cultural groups and that focusing on difference is ultimately divisive (Qualitative Teacher Survey). As mainstream, American ideology values the individual, teachers willingly accommodated indi-vidual needs. However, as collective identity contradicts the American ethos, many non-Native teachers rejected the notion that cultural differences should impact classroom practice. One non-Native participant, Greta, argued,

> I have never felt that I should treat any student differently…And I think- we do take into account individual differences. But, I'm getting the impression that I'm now supposed to take this one group of students and treat them differently. And I'm not sure I can deal with that. (Group Meeting, December 2, 2008)

Greta's quote highlights how calling attention to the role cultural differences play in the classroom may question deeply held beliefs about schooling as a meritocracy (Lomawaima, 2006). This excerpt helps to articulate the resistance many mainstream teachers had towards acknowledging cultural difference. Another non-Native par-ticipant, Candy, took a color-blind approach towards her students. She mentioned how she doesn't notice race except in situations where students are socially grouped together (Participant Interview, July 10, 2008). Overall, the non-Native participants tended to downplay or ignore the cultural differences. The Native participants, on the other hand, viewed cultural knowledge and understanding as a keystone to successfully teaching Native students. These contrasting conceptions of cultural competency divided the participant group along cultural lines.

Cultural Disconnect

The data also uncovered many examples of cultural disconnect between Native staff and students and the school district. Cultural disconnect refers to educational settings where sharp contrasts exist between the culture of teachers and schooling and the culture of students' home communities (Cleary & Peacock, 1998). One Na-tive participant, Hannah, addressed this cultural disconnect in a group meeting.

> We really need to bridge the gap between your community and our community. We are aware of your community, yet it seems like generally speaking the majority of the district only knows the bad stuff about our community. They don't really know the richness of everything else that's here or the true struggles of what's happening.

Further she added, "[Mohawk] culture and the values are … totally opposite than your country" (Group Meeting, August 14, 2008).

Through this research, particular Mohawk cultural norms that conflict with

mainstream culture in schooling were identified. Mohawk values such as a less hierarchical relationship between teachers and students, the significance of sovereignty issues, and the nature of a matriarchal society differ significantly from mainstream cultural and classroom expectations. For example, according to the Native participants, non-Native teachers are generally unaware of the continuation of the role of matriarchy in contemporary life. Historically, matriarchy has been a foundation of Haudenosaunee society (Alfred, 1995; Johansen & Mann, 2000). As one Mohawk participant, Sally, described,

> We're raised that women are very powerful… girls are given a lot of responsibility and respect, especially their opinions and their voice, than like in white culture. I find for the most part our women, our girls I should say, we're talking about elementary [school], they're pretty tough kids. They're smart. They're independent. You know?

Sally went on to describe a non-Native teacher who had trouble relating to the Mohawk girls in his classroom. She stated,

> He just has a really difficult time with the strong, young women that we tend to have. He gets frustrated very easily with that population. I just find that he doesn't understand them, and he doesn't try to understand them either. (Participant Interview, July 31, 2008)

In essence, Mohawk girls may display a stronger classroom presence and demeanor than is customary for girls in mainstream society. As a result, some non-Native teachers may have difficulty relating to these students because their cultural and classroom expectations are challenged.

Intercultural Miscommunication

Throughout the study, examples of intercultural miscommunication arose between the participants. Prior research has identified some of the structural features of discourse which highlight the contrasts in speech norms between Native and non-Native communities (Scollon & Scollon, 1980). In the Farmingdale study, for example, the Mohawk participants tended to reflect longer before verbalizing their thoughts. The non-Native participants, on the other hand, tended to think and reflect out loud. In addition, the non-Native participants tended to monopolize the group conversations in part through verbal debate and asking direct questions. In contrast, the Native participants tended to listen rather than assert their opinions in debate. Similar studies have found that some Native communities do not use debate and questioning as a communicative style (Lipka & McCarty, 1994; Scollon & Scollon, 1980).

After running an NVivo query, it was found that the three primary non-Native participants had the most turns in speaking with Mark at 869, Greta at 771, and Candy at 417 totaling 2,057 turns at speaking. The three primary Native participants

on the other hand totaled 1,023 turns with Johnnie at 364, Jane at 342, and Sally at 297. The two other participants, Hannah and Bonnie were absent from many of the meetings therefore their turn taking was not included in this calculation. When analyzing these data it becomes apparent that the non-Native participants took more than twice as many turns speaking as the Native participants. These data clearly indicate that the non-Native participants overwhelmingly dominated the group discourse.

The Native participants, on the other hand, tended to hold back their opinions through listening without talking and reflecting before speaking. Further, the Mohawk participants refrained from voicing their positions because they believed the non-Native participants were not ready to listen. In his research, Foley (1996) identifies the many uses of silence in Native communities including, silence as "an honorable way of handling the garrulous, aggressive whites" (p.87). This conscious and active silence contrasts the long-standing mainstream stereotype of the quiet, passive Native American.

After our final group meeting, Sally confided, "I kept quiet and held back. I didn't reveal the cultural differences because I didn't think they were ready to hear it" (Field Notes, December 3, 2008). Jane agreed with her sentiment. In essence they felt that the non-Native participants were not really open to listening or learning. The non-Natives, on the other hand, assumed the Mohawk participants were in agreement because they did not openly debate or contradict points being made. On the contrary, however, the Mohawk participants ardently disagreed with many of the conclusions being drawn. In fact, the more they disagreed, the quieter they became because they believed the non-Native teachers were demonstrating their inability to understand.

Issues of Trust

The Native participants described a lack of trust between Akwesasne and mainstream governmental institutions including schooling. This lack of trust, rooted in the historical transgressions against the Mohawk Nation, played out in the participant group dynamic. During field work, for example, Johnnie described how one of the non-Native participants had spoken disparagingly in the teachers' room about the issues that had come up in the collaborative group discussions (Field Notes, November 2, 2008). Earlier in the study, Johnnie had expressed concerns about the possibility of group discussions being shared with district administrators. Although group confidentiality was stressed at the meetings, two of the non-Native participants did share group information with administrators without group consensus.

As a result, Johnnie withdrew from the project before our final meeting. Essentially, he felt that the majority of non-Native participants could not be trusted (Field Notes, January 14, 2009). Two Native participants, Jane and Sally, shared the reason for Johnnie's withdrawal after the group meetings had concluded. Although conflicts arose in the participant group dynamic, having a common goal of creating a

professional development program for the district pushed the majority of participants towards continuing their involvement in the study despite the challenges.

Developmental Trajectory of Understanding

Prior to the study, most of the participants had very limited exposure to or understanding of historical or contemporary life in Akwesasne (Participant Interviews, Qualitative Teacher Survey). The Emergent Stage describes the non-Native teachers' initial steps towards Mohawk cultural competency including visits to cultural institutions in Akwesasne and presentations by Mohawk elders. In this stage, participants were exposed to the importance of traditional and academic knowledge for Mohawk students' success. Participants also critically examined the deficit paradigm in which Mohawk funds of knowledge are viewed as a detriment to academic learning (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005).

During the course of this study, two Native elders gave presentations to the collaborative group. In the following excerpts, non-Native teachers describe the impact of these presentations. Candy stated,

> Donald Coolidge's presentation, some of the historical, that sense of political insight and strained feelings toward education, certainly a sense of there was a closed door at one point, and you'll do it my way or no way… There's a little mistrust, imagine that? (Group Meeting, December 2, 2008)

Bonnie also stated,

> You know, even that educational sheet that [Lila] gave us at the last... the history of Native Education. That was huge… You know? Because I think you forget. I forgot…I had forgotten about what they had to go through, and what they still, you know, often still go through. (Participant Interview, October 7, 2008)

These data suggest that as the non-Native participants developed along the trajectory of understanding, they began to recognize the legacy of attending a historically racist and culturally demeaning educational system. Further, Bonnie indicates that these assimilationist views are still a part of the schooling environment.

Through the course of the study, Native participants also came to recognize the non-Native teachers' need for support in order to foster Mohawk cultural competency. Sally stated,

> Again coming together, I think getting the non-Native teacher perspective especially- because it's going to be such an important part …through this program, just to hear what you guys have to say and how we can help support you. (Group Meeting, August 14, 2008)

This awareness on the part of Native participants, aided the teachers in reaching the Emergent Stage along the developmental trajectory.

Acknowledgement Stage

Most of the group participants also entered the Acknowledgement Stage where cultural differences between mainstream and Native communities are recognized and respected. For example, participants explored their own cultural backgrounds and discussed research on cultural conflict and miscommunication between Akwesasne and Farmingdale. To fully develop in this stage, participants analyzed the discourse patterns in their cross-cultural group discussions. Due to differences in communicative styles, nonverbal activities such as "shared journaling" allowed participants to dialogue without interruption or monopolize the discourse (Pewewardy, 2005). The following excerpt illustrates this written "conversation" where non-Native participants were better able to hear Mohawk perspectives.

> *Jane*: I am going to implement: By grade level a list of the Mohawk Names, with phonetic spelling and meaning- so teachers have it for the beginning of school. I think this would really help teachers out. Many parents do not like names shortened because sometimes when this is done it changes the meaning to something insulting or it loses its meaning. Many traditional people see their name as a gift and their medicine. There is much meaning in names.

> *Greta*: I like this idea because I have a problem pronouncing names. Sometimes I call students Mr._____, but I find myself struggling to pronounce names. My students have been really good about my mispronunciation and have always given me another "shortened" name to use. I've never realized that some people would consider this insulting. I guess it's a wake-up call.

As teachers entered the Acknowledgement Stage along the Developmental Trajectory, they considered the consequences of their lack of cultural knowledge (Memo, September 24, 2008). In the following passage, for example, Greta explains how the group conversations fostered deeper understanding of cultural differences. She stated,

> Well, what we talked about last week that many Native students think that if they talk about themselves, they're bragging. That's something that would never, ever crossed my mind. We talked about that in August, and I do this thing where I have the kids interview each other, and I watched very carefully this year, and made sure I said to the kids if you don't feel comfortable answering the questions, just say I don't feel... (Group Meeting, September 23, 2008)

As in this excerpt, the non-Native participants came to recognize that their lack of awareness of Mohawk cultural nuances created barriers for Mohawk students' school accessibility.

Receptivity Stage

In the Receptivity Stage, non-Native teachers worked to refrain from dominating the group discourse in order to create more trusting cross-cultural relationships. During these discussions, participants engaged in dialogue regarding controversial

issues such as Mohawk sovereignty. This was explored through role play in addition to other experiential activities. Once the parameters for cross-cultural conversations are defined, Native participants may be more willing to share relevant and important cultural knowledge.

During the course of this study, most of the non-Native participants did not fully reach the Receptivity Stage. However, in some instances, cross-cultural dialogue did result in better understanding. In the following dialogue, for example, Johnnie and Greta discuss why a Native person has been designated as the Native grant coordinator for the district. This concept challenged Greta's beliefs about promoting a color blind society. Through the conversation, however, she began to acknowledge the validity of the Native perspective.

> *Greta*: I don't understand why the [grant] person needs to be Mohawk. I don't understand that. To me it almost sounds like reverse discrimination.
>
> *Johnnie*: I believe it's coming from the reservation to understand everything that goes on in terms of the big things- in terms of smuggling or the small things in terms of getting people to the border.
>
> *Greta*: Because I'm not Native and don't live on the reservation, is that what you're really?
>
> *Johnnie*: I just think that would be a better fit. I'm just saying the big things and little things we go through, the students have to go through.
>
> *Greta*: Yeah... It just struck me as like reverse discrimination… I mean, I understand—You're right. (Group Meeting, November 18, 2008)

Although this cross-cultural dialogue was not characteristic of the overall group dynamic, there were instances such as this when participants reached the Receptivity Stage.

Sharing Stage and Two-Way Meaningful Dialogue

In the Sharing Stage, the parameters of cross-cultural discourse are defined and set so that Native participants have the chance to speak and feel heard. In this stage, non-Native participants gain access to the insider knowledge which helps teachers create supportive learning environments for Native students. Finally, in the Meaningful Two-Way Dialogue Stage, a safe and trusting environment has been established where all participants share and feel heard. Given the time constraints of this study, participants did not fully reach these final two stages along the trajectory. Future professional development programs based on the Developmental Trajectory of Understanding could facilitate individuals' growth along the five stages. Through progression along these developmental stages, participants can work to bridge the cultural divide between communities in order to improve schooling experiences for Native students.

Contributions and Implications

As an action research study, contributions to practice were a critical component of the study's outcome. This research study shined a spotlight on the need for Mohawk cultural competency professional development for non-Native teachers in the district. Based on conversations in the group meetings, the study also raised a level of consciousness about intercultural relations in this heterogeneous school setting. Finally, the study brought to the forefront the lack of opportunities in place for non-Native teachers to expand their knowledge base. As a result of this action research study, the Farmingdale Native American Resource program members created a resource guide on Mohawk cultural competency for the district teachers (Field Notes, December 18, 2008).

Following the recommendations of this study, the district superintendent also agreed to implement aspects of the professional development program. Specifically, the district added cultural competency training into the district's new-teacher orientation. In addition, the district supported the group's recommendation for an extensive teacher handbook on Mohawk cultural practices. The district webpage now also includes an anonymous forum for asking potentially sensitive questions about Mohawk culture and cultural competency. Finally, the district administration is exploring the possibility of conducting a full-day, professional development training for all staff, held at the Ronatahonni Cultural Center in Akwesasne. Both the new teacher training and the all-staff session will include a tour of Akwesasne and have workshops led by tribal elders.

As stated earlier, the cross-cultural issues at stake in the schools and community are rooted in centuries-old historical transgressions and as such, are deeply entrenched. Clearly, even a one-day professional development session cannot fully address the complexity of this relationship. However, a comprehensive program with ongoing support, as outlined in this study, can begin the conversation that could lead towards a more positive schooling environment for Mohawk students.

This study also contributes to the research on teacher education by proposing a model of Native cultural competency professional development applicable to other school settings. The process of bringing together various stakeholders across cultural lines may be useful for other settings with a population of Native students and a majority of mainstream teachers and administrators. One benefit of the model is the inherent flexibility due to different stakeholders' input. The following questions may be useful for adapting the Developmental Trajectory of Understanding to different schooling contexts.

What is the general level of prior knowledge regarding Native cultures among your school staff?

What is the general perception of cross-cultural relations in your school setting?

Do various stakeholders have different perceptions of cultural competency in schooling?

How do the stakeholders in your setting describe the level of trust between the communities?

After analyzing cross-cultural dialogue, what do the stakeholders notice about the discourse?

Using these questions may help tailor the Developmental Trajectory of Understanding for particular schooling contexts. In turn, this supports the creation of a program that specifically addresses the needs of each environment. Future related work could continue to explore how mainstream teachers working with Native students progress along the Developmental Trajectory of Understanding through on-going professional development and support.

Note

[1] All names of people and towns have been changed to protect the anonymity of the participants.

References

Adams, D. W. (1995). *Education for extinction: American Indians and the boarding school experience, 1875-1928*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas.

Alfred, G. R. (1995). *Heeding the voices of our ancestors: Kahnawake Mohawk politics and the rise of native nationalism*. Toronto & New York: Oxford University Press.

Banks, J. A., Cochran-Smith, M., Moll, L., Richert, A., Zeichner, K., LePage, P., et al. (2005). Teaching diverse learners. In L. Darling-Hammond & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Beaulieu, D. (2006). A survey and assessment of culturally based education programs for Native American students in the United States. *Journal of American Indian Education, 45*(2 part Special Issue), 50-61.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods* (3rd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Brayboy. (2005). Toward a tribal critical race theory in education. *The Urban Review, 37*(5), 425-446.

Brayboy, & Deyhle, D. (2000). Insider-outsider: Researchers in American Indian communities. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 163-169.

Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory*. London & Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Cleary, L. M., & Peacock, T. D. (1997). Disseminating American Indian educational research through stories: A case against academic discourse. *Journal of American Indian Education, 37*(1), 7-15.

Cleary, L. M., & Peacock, T. D. (1998). *Collected wisdom: American Indian education*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Deyhle, & Swisher. (1997). Research in American Indian and Alaska Native Education: From assimilation to self-determination. In M. Apple (Ed.), *Review of research in education* (Vol. 22). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Eder, D. J. (2007). Bringing Navajo storytelling practices into schools: The importance of maintaining cultural integrity. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 38*(3), 278-296.

Foley, D. (1996). The silent Indian as a cultural production. In B. Levinson, D. Foley & D. Holland (Eds.), *The cultural production of the educated person* (pp. 79-91). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Freng, S., Freng, A., & Moore, H. (2007). Examining American Indians' recall of cultural inclusion in school. *Journal of American Indian Education, 46*(2), 42-61.

Garroutte, E. (2001). The racial formation of American Indians. *American Indian Quarterly, 25*(2), 224.

González, N., Moll, L. C., & Amanti, C. (2005). *Funds of knowledge: Theorizing practices in households, communities, and classrooms*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Grande, S. (2004). *Red pedagogy: Native American social and political thought*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Herr, K., & Anderson, G. L. (2005). *The action research dissertation: A guide for students and faculty*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Howard, G. (2006). *We can't teach what we don't know: White teachers, multiracial schools* (2nd ed.). New York: Teachers College Press.

Johansen, B. E., & Mann, B. A. (2000). *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy)*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Klug, B. J., & Hall, J. L. (2002). Opening doors to wisdom: Working together for our children. *Action in Teacher Education, 24*(2), 34-41.

Klug, B. J., & Whitfield, P. T. (2003). *Widening the circle: Culturally relevant pedagogy for American Indian children*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.

Lafrance, R. (1995). *Indian education or education of Indians: The St. Regis Mohawk experience* (St. Regis Mohawk, New York). DAI, 56(04A), 120.

Lambe, J., & Swamp, J. (2002). Effective cross-cultural dialogue: Challenges and opportunities. *McGill Journal of Education, 37*(3), 423-437.

Lipka, J., & McCarty, T. L. (1994). Changing the culture of schooling: Navajo and Yup'ik cases. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly, 25*, 266-284.

Lomawaima, K. T. (2001). Educating Native Americans. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (pp. 331-347). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2002a). *Reliability, validity, and authenticity in American Indian and Alaska Native research*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools. .

Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2002b). When tribal sovereignty challenges democracy: American Indian education and the democratic ideal. *American Educational Research Journal, 39*(2), 279-305.

Lomawaima, K. T., & McCarty, T. L. (2006). *"To remain an Indian": Lessons in democracy from a century of Native American education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

McCardle, P., & Demmert, W. (2006). Introduction: Improving academic performance among American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian students. *Journal of American Indian Education, 45*(2 part Special Issue), 1-5.

Mihesuah, D. A. (1998). *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Mohawk, J. (1998). Last words: Indian sovereignties under attack. *Native Americas, 15*(2), 64.

Pewewardy, C. (2002). American Indian and White students talking about ethnic identity in teacher education programs: Helping teacher education students know themselves as cultural beings. *Action in Teacher Education, 24*(2), 22-33.

Pewewardy, C. (2005). Shared journaling: A methodology for engaging White preservice students into multicultural education discourse. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 32*(1), 41-60.

Pewewardy, C., & Hammer, P. C. (2003). *Culturally responsive teaching for American Indian students*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools.

Reyhner, J. (1992). Teaching American Indian students. Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press.

Reyhner, J., & Jacobs, D. T. (2002). Preparing teachers of American Indian and Alaska Native students. *Action in Teacher Education, 24*(2), 85-93.

Santiago-Rivera, A., Morse, G., Hunt, A., & Lickers, H. (1998). Building a community-based research partnership: Lessons from the Mohawk Nation of Akwesasne. *Journal of Community Psychology, 26*(2), 163-174.

Schatzman, L., & Strauss, A. L. (1973). *Field research: Strategies for a natural sociology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. B. K. (1980). *Interethnic communication: How to recognize stereotypes and improve communication between ethnic groups*. Fairbanks, AK: Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska.

Singleton, G. E., & Linton, C. (2006). *Courageous conversations about race: A field guide for achieving equity in schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. London, UK: Zed Books.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. M. (1997). *Grounded theory in practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Swisher. (1998). Why Indian people should write about Indian education. In D. A. Mihesuah (Ed.), *Natives and academics: Researching and writing about American Indians* (pp. 190-199). Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Tharp, R. G. (2006). Four hundred years of evidence: Culture, pedagogy, and Native America. *Journal of American Indian Education, 45*(2 part Special Issue), 6-25.

Vizenor, G. R., & Lee, A. R. (1999). *Postindian conversations*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

Writer, J., & Chavez, R. (2002). Indigenous perspectives of teacher education: Beyond perceived borders. *Action in Teacher Education, 24*(2), 1-93.