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Becoming a Role Model:
Experiences of Native Student Teachers

This article examines identity and the experiences of being a role model among graduates of a Native Teacher Education Program (NTEP). It also studies how the NTEP supported the participants' development as role models. Central findings focus attention on their leadership experiences, questions about their ability to be a role model, and the benefits and disadvantages of being a role model. It was also found that the NTEP provided the context for the participants to reconstruct their identity to include being a role model. Three stages of becoming a role model are described.

Cet article porte sur l'identité et les expériences en tant que modèle de rôle des diplômés du Native Teacher Education Program (NTEP) un programme visant les futurs enseignants autochtones. L'appui qu'offre le programme aux participants en matière de leur développement comme modèle de rôle est également étudié. Les résultats traitent de ce qu'ont vécu les participants en tant que leaders, de certaines questions quant à leur capacité d'être modèle de rôle, et des avantages et des inconvénients découlant de cette expérience. Nous avons également constaté que le NTEP a offert aux participants un contexte dans lequel ils pouvaient reconstruire leur identité pour y incorporer celui de modèle de rôle. Finalement, nous décrivons trois étapes dans le développement d'un modèle de rôle.

Introduction

Native educators can bring much to their communities: an understanding of the values of the people and the skills to blend traditional teachings with the provincial curriculum (Kirkness, 1999; Smith-Mohamed, 1998). Native teachers can also be role models for others, which involves teaching the culture, modeling pride in being Native, involvement in community activities, and showing others that it is possible to create a better life for themselves (Friesen & Orr, 1998). Although we know that Native teachers can be role models and that some enroll in Aboriginal education programs to become role models (Duquette, 2001), the experience of developing into a role model among Native teachers is less well understood. Therefore, it was the purpose of this research to investigate the role modeling experiences of graduates of the Native Teacher Education Program (NTEP) at the University of Ottawa. The role the NTEP played in supporting the reconstruction of the identities of the participants and the development of the graduates into role models for their communities is also examined.

The University of Ottawa has offered a two-year community-based Native Teacher Education Program since 1997 to students living in remote areas of northern Ontario. Students take courses in the North during the summers and

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through distance education in the fall and winter semesters. They also do 12 weeks of supervised practica and spend much of the two-year period working alongside mentor teachers in their local schools. On successful completion of the NTEP, they receive a certificate from the University of Ottawa, and when they complete their undergraduate degree, a baccalaureate in education degree is granted. The NTEP graduates are also eligible for certification by the Ontario College of Teachers, which qualifies them to teach in all parts of the province.

Review of the Literature

Identity

Most scholars in anthropological and cultural studies no longer hold to the culturalist view that an individual's identity is a stable entity that is shaped by rituals and other key elements of enculturation that solely reflect cultural history (Butler, 1993; Hall, 1996). Recent studies on identity (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Sarup, 1996) take a social constructivist approach to the development of identity and suggest three basic qualities of identities. First, people are composites of many, often contradictory, identities. Second, identities change in relation to historically specific contexts. Third, identities are constructed and maintained over time through discourses and practices. Forming an identity takes time and involves the interplay between inner speaking, cultural resources, and current practices (Holland et al.). Moreover, it involves excluding what one is not, as well as determining what one is (Butler).

Hall (1996) describes cultural identity as the true self, hiding among the artificially imposed selves that people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. He explains further that despite superficial differences, the "cultural belongingness" anchors one's identity in a specific group. In a discussion on identity and Native women, Anderson (2000) takes a social constructivist approach: identity is negotiated in time, place, and social context, and it can be redefined over time. Similar to Hall, she assumes the position that identities involve the process of becoming rather than being: not "who we are" or "where we come from," but "what we might become." However, unlike Britzman (1992), who views identity as distinct from social role, Anderson sees the two as inextricably linked. She stated, "Native women define themselves through responsibilities" (p. 239), and identified four critical roles of Native women: childbearing, managing resources, teaching and passing on culture, and working for social justice. These roles become part of a social constructivist framework for the development of their identity. Anderson also documents four stages of identity development among Native women:

- Resisting negative definitions of being;
- Reclaiming Aboriginal tradition;
- Constructing a positive identity by translating tradition into the contemporary context; and
- Acting on that identity in a way that nourishes the overall well-being of Native communities. (p. 15)

In this article I focus on the role of Aboriginal women as teachers, and specifically how a group of graduates of a teacher education program

reconstructed their identities and came to see themselves as role models for their students and their communities.

Aboriginal People and Education

Although resistance to attending school in the structured environment that the Western educational system provides still exists (Swanson, 2003), Aboriginal people in Canada are beginning to realize that education is essential for a better life and success in today's world (Kirkness, 1999; Swanson). However, high school completion rates and enrollment in postsecondary education remain relatively low (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). The reasons cited for the lack of success in school among native youth is the paucity of family and community support (Clarke, 2002; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen) and teachers who do not understand the needs of the students (Bergstrom, Cleary, & Peacock, 2002; Smith-Mohamed, 1998). Another barrier to academic success is the shortage of models with whom to identify, people who have gone through the process before (Clarke; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen). Smith-Mohamed commented on the need for Aboriginal people to act as role models for children, as relatively few such positive models have been available for some time. Although residential schools no longer exist, their effects may be observed in the northern communities in the form of suicide, alcoholism, family violence, sexual abuse, unemployment, as well as a loss of cultural continuity and a sense of who they are in the world (Clarke; Goulet & McLeod, 2002; Hill, 1999). Although family members may not always be role models for children, teachers may be able to fill that gap and in doing so increase retention and academic success among Native students (Pavel, 1999; Smith-Mohamed).

Aboriginal people are responsible for transmitting their culture and teaching their children values, priorities, and how to make sense of things (Friedel, 1999). First Nations educators view themselves as being the best judges of the educational needs of their children (Charters-Voght, 1999). They share with the Elders the job of transmitting their culture to the children in their communities (Anderson, 2000). Native educators are viewed not only as instructors of the provincial curriculum, but also as transmitters of cultural values and practices. But Smith-Mohamed (1998) reports that among Native teachers there are also few positive role models. However, Kirkness (1999) offers hope of developing role models through well-trained Native teachers who by virtue of their common ancestry will respect the children and act as in ways that will inspire them to the possibilities for their lives.

Positive Role Models

Simply put, a role model is a person who serves as an example of positive behavior. The National Aboriginal Health Organization (2004) describes a role model as a person

> who leads the way, inspires others to achieve their goals and encourages them to make healthy and positive choices.… [Role models] are recognized for achievements … they have a set of goals for themselves, and have worked hard to achieve them. Some have overcome difficult times. They have all had a positive influence on their peers and community. (p. 1)

Jules (1999) adds that Aboriginal role models have "a clear understanding of Native Indian ways and culture, they can legitimize the students' Native

Indianness, thus building in them a more positive self-concept about being Native Indian" (p. 46). Jules equates leadership among Natives with providing a role model and outlines several qualities: a person who is integrated fully into the community not as someone above the community, but who is there to provided support; possesses wisdom, humility, and integrity; and is capable of directing people without giving the impression that they are being told what to do. Smith-Mohamed (1998) found that kindness, fairness, accessibility, knowledge, and willingness to help the student were qualities that defined the role models among Natives enrolled in postsecondary programs. It is important that role models actually demonstrate these qualities in their behavior as Native people generally learn and access others through observing actions (Goulet, 2001; Jules). As observed by Bergstrom et al. (2002), being a role model is "done by living out a system of values that children get to witness day after day." (p. 118). Therefore, role models are important for Native children and youth because through their example they show others "the good path." Moreover, some suggest that Native teachers should be role models for their students (Friesen & Orr, 1998).

In a study involving the 1997-1999 cohort of graduates from the University of Ottawa's NTEP, it was found that many believed that schools should have Native teachers to act as positive role models in the community. The graduates expressed a desire to teach children about traditional values and model pride in being Native (Duquette, 2001). Along similar lines, Aboriginal students living in northern Saskatchewan who were enrolled in a teacher education program (NORTEP) felt that becoming a role model was part of learning how to be a Native teacher (Friesen & Orr, 1998). For them, being a role model included extracurricular involvement in community sports and cultural activities; participating in local politics; and showing others that working, taking courses, and raising a family is possible. For the students in this study, being a role model manifested itself as becoming a change agent working for the improvement of the schools and communities. However, it is not known how students in Native teacher education programs experience becoming a role model and how postsecondary programs can support the development of role models.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand the experiences of NTEP students as they become role models in their communities and determine how the NTEP can assist in the development of leadership qualities. The research questions are as follows:
1. What are the role modeling experiences of the NTEP students?
2. How does the NTEP support the development of role models?

Methodology

This qualitative study used a phenomenological approach, which emphasizes the individual's subjective experience (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The intent is to understand and describe an event or phenomenon from the point of view of the participants (Patton, 2002).

Participants

The participants were among the 32 students who graduated from the NTEP delivered by the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. There were 19 graduates from the Sioux Lookout District and 13 from the Thunder Bay area (Matawa First Nations), who ranged in age from 20 to 51. Of these two groups of graduates, 12 participated in this research on role models: five from the Sioux Lookout District and seven from the Thunder Bay area. All the participants were female. Most had been involved in their community school before enrolling in the NTEP as a teacher's aide/classroom assistant, a band councillor with responsibilities in education, or as an unqualified teacher. All participants entered the NTEP to further their education, and all but one enrolled to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher.

Although only 12 students participated in this research, at least two graduates who chose not to do so indicated to me (also a coordinator of the NTEP) that they did not feel like role models because they were not perfect. Others may have chosen not to participate due to time constraints.

Data Sources

For each group of graduates there were two sources of data: a questionnaire and individual interviews. The questionnaire consisted mostly of open-ended items related to ideas about role models and experiences as role models. Sample questions included what qualities they wished to model and to whom, describing a time they felt like a role model, and the benefits and disadvantages of being a role model. Seven women also chose to participate in an in-depth semistructured interview in which individual experiences of being a role model were explored further (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Data Collection

After the NTEP students met the requirements for graduation, they were mailed a package containing a letter in which the research was described and a copy of the questionnaire. Those wishing to participate in the interview indicated this on the questionnaire that was returned to me. The two groups of NTEP graduates held separate graduation ceremonies, and interviews were conducted on the day before each group's ceremony as well as during the month following the graduation. The interviews were carried out in person and over the telephone. I took notes from the individual interviews, transcribed them, and sent a copy to each participant for review and approval.

Data Analysis

The multiple sources of data produced thick, rich information about the role modeling experiences of the NTEP students. The demographic information obtained from the participants was analyzed descriptively. Although there were two sets of participants, the data were grouped together for analysis. The data from the open-ended items found in the questionnaires and the interviews were organized according to the question (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Then they were arranged into categories and subcategories. Next they were examined for similarities and differences. Data from the questionnaires and interviews were analyzed similarly. Emerging from the analysis were the following themes: leadership, the perceptions of others, questions about their ability to be a role model, and the constant surveillance of others.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was achieved by various means. Data were collected from various sources and from two groups of participants (Creswell, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 1996). Transferability was achieved through the use of multiple participants, and a confirmability audit was conducted to ensure that the data could be traced to original sources (Mertens, 2005). I also conducted a dependability audit to ensure that the instruments were producing relevant data.

Findings

Of the 12 participants only two indicated that they conversed in their In-digenous language (Ojicree or Ojibway) and wrote syllabics. Three understood the language but did not speak it, and four understood and spoke their language. Three participants did not respond to the item. Eleven women indicated that they participated in cultural activities such as seasonal hunts, powwows, sweat lodges, and feasts. All but two were presently or had previously been involved in community work such as band council, an economic development corporation, an alternative school committee, and the police board. Ten of the participants reported that they had a person who acted as a positive role model for them. They modeled the following for the participants: perseverance, high job expectations, positive sportsmanship, professionalism, independence, and respect for others. In turn the participants felt they were role models for their family, friends, students, and others in the community.

As the participants were graduates of a Native teacher education program, it is not surprising that six of the 12 wanted to model for others the importance of completing one's education. These participants wanted to model a variety of goals, qualities and life styles. A participant said, "You need grade 12 to get the job." One woman wrote: "completing school leads to better opportunities." Another felt that having an education made you more independent. She wanted to model a different lifestyle for her younger sister: "I want her to get an education and go places in the world. I don't want her to think that all there is is having a boyfriend and having kids." Another woman stated that her message to teens was "Don't waste your life. Further your education now and not later. Finish your education before you have kids." Another felt that some young people gave up when there was a failure or even the possibility of failure. She wanted to show others that they should not give up so easily on their education and described this as "getting over the first hump and sticking with it." Others wanted to show Native women that they could be mothers, have a job, and take courses at the same time. One participant wanted to model that "it is possible to go to school and work at the same time." Two others wanted to model a healthy lifestyle. One indicated that she wanted to demonstrate sobriety as she described herself as "an over-comer." They believed that completing a university program would inspire members of their families, students in the school, and other adults in the community to further their own education.

These women wanted to become role models because of the lack of positive models in their own communities. One graduate wrote, "Positive role models are hard to come by, especially for our Native youngsters." Another commented, "Parents are simply not always there to show or model this behavior."

A woman wrote, "Children learn by watching and doing. What you're doing puts an impression on them." These women saw a need in their communities for adults to demonstrate the qualities of perseverance, confidence, independence, and professionalism. They also felt that children and youth needed to see that Native people could complete their education and hold well-paid jobs. One participant wrote, "I think it's important for someone to be a role model so that others will be motivated and encouraged to continue their education and have a steady job. It also makes an impact on the community." These women perceived a need for positive role models, showed leadership, and took the initiative to address the problem themselves.

The participants also wanted to show through their own example what they and others could accomplish. They wanted to show what was possible. A participant stated, "I want younger people to see other options to life than what the norm is here." Another woman wrote, "I want the children/my children to know they too can do anything they want if they try, even if they endure obstacles." Another commented: "I want to be a role model because we need more of our Native people becoming professionals. If they see their own people they can relate too. It will be easier for them to complete anything they want." The participants wanted to show and support the importance of having long-term goals and dreams, acting on them, and persisting when obstacles are presented.

Experiences as a Role Model

Many of the experiences as a role model described by the participants were closely linked to acting as a leader, usually in an educational context. One woman told of an experience when she and the chief and council met with the Minister of Indian Affairs to deal with some educational issues.

> I knew what I was talking about when it came to resourcing our students and how Indian Affairs were not providing enough of anything. I made an excellent speech, which resulted in our school getting 4.6 million dollars. The Minister respected and recognized my knowledge, and we were rewarded!

Another participant single-handedly began a movement to save the public school attended by the children in her community. The board of education had slated the school for closure, but this woman went from door to door garnering support, researched the information to refute the arguments for closure, and made an impassioned speech on the reasons for keeping the school open. Her efforts paid off, and the school will remain open indefinitely. Another woman told of an experience when she was leading a parent group:

> We were discussing children's behaviors in school, and because I work in the teaching profession, I was able to give pointers on how to deal with your child, the teacher, and principal, and to work as a group to solve a problem.

One woman told of a role modeling experience as a teacher of literacy skills to adults in her community. Another participant wrote, "Coaching girls' basketball and girls' baseball really helped me realize that the girls do look up to me, and they listen when I talk." One woman had a similar realization when she was practice teaching in provincial schools and the students respected her as a

teacher. In these five cases, the participants were able to act in leadership positions because they had knowledge and gained the respect of others.

For two others, the understanding that others viewed their actions as a model to follow came from the comments of community members. One woman wrote:

> One of my old supervisors at a gas bar, where I worked before going back to school told me: "When I saw you going back to school with three children, I said to myself, I could do it too." She went back the year after me and graduated and now has a better, more satisfying career as a bookkeeper.

Another participant said, "Two years ago, the vice principal asked if I could chaperon the grade 8 trip because she thought I would be a good role model for the young girls. That's the first time I was referred to as a role model." In both cases, these two women had not realized that they were viewed as role models until they heard the comments of others.

During the two-year program, there were times when some of the participants questioned their ability to be a good role model for others. Two of the women had some doubts when faced with difficult personal situations. One woman stated, "I questioned myself last year, when my husband left me, whether or not I could continue. But I told myself I should continue and not end up like him." Another said, "When I saw children being taken away from their families or the child who wanted to commit suicide, I got too emotionally involved and was crying. I wondered what kind of person would want to be like me." Others questioned their ability to be a positive role model when they encountered the stress of the demands of the program. One commented, "Because of the many areas you need to address as a professional in education, I wondered if I would be able to handle it all." Another woman revealed that there were times when she "cut loose and quit being what others expect of me." These behaviors were in response to the "many struggles I have had to overcome in the past two years." Although most of the participants did not appear to have doubts about their ability to be a role model, others did.

Of the participants in this research, only one reported that she did not consider herself a role model. This woman had a thorough knowledge of the language, participated in cultural activities, and was active in the community. She wrote, "A role model to me is a person who is healthy spiritually, physically, mentally, and emotionally." Although this participant wanted to be a role model, she felt that to be one would require her to become a healthier person and not use tobacco or alcohol. It appeared that she felt role models had to be faultless. Although most of the participants agreed that as a role model they had to present themselves well in public, one individual described a time when she too felt that she had to be perfect. She said, "I don't know whether I was pretending to be someone I'm not … I felt like I had to be perfect: can't go out and stay at home. I had to be somebody else. I hated it." She went on to say that a friend helped her to understand that role models have to be human too. She also learned that role models did not have to be a celebrity or someone who was famous. They were people living in the community who had high expectations for themselves and supported others in reaching their goals; they "gave back to the community."

Benefits and Disadvantages of Being a Role Model

The participants viewed respect from others as a benefit of being a role model. One woman commented, "The benefits would be people respecting you, looking up to you, being a part of other's accomplishments." Another wrote that having a "good reputation" and that "people know who I am" were benefits of being a role model in her community. Some of the participants appreciated what others said about them. Two women indicated that others were saying the following about them: "A lot of things are happening here because of what you did" and "You're a teacher now. You have your own classroom now. Wow!" Another benefit was the self-esteem that had developed, and one person stated that as a result she was "not afraid to take a challenge, not afraid to try new things." Another wrote, "personal satisfaction … your children are proud of you and follow in your footsteps." The participants viewed their own self-esteem as a benefit of being a role model, as well as being able to influence the actions of others positively due to the respect they had garnered.

Another benefit was being able to make a contribution to their communities. Two participants felt that by modeling academic achievement, stressing the importance of education among other parents, and by "encouraging and supporting others," they could help "make the community strong." One woman told of how she encouraged the parents of her kindergarten class:

> I made them feel welcome. I tell parents at parent-teacher conferences that I am modeling how to behave. We can talk about the problems. But let's find a solution and work together … When I did this, I had more parental involvement.

Two others felt that by modeling academic achievement, stressing the importance of education among other parents, and by "encouraging and supporting others," they could help "make the community strong." One of the young women felt that she could contribute and support children in another way. She left her community at the end of the school year to pursue an undergraduate degree at a university in the Maritimes. She intends to return with the degree and make a significant contribution to the education of children in her community. She said, "I want to come back and teach again. I will have more background knowledge … The kids here need a lot of help in their school work." Therefore, through modeling, some of the participants were encouraging and supporting others, which they felt would ultimately result in a better-educated and stronger community.

However, the participants also told of the one disadvantage of being a role model: constantly being observed by others. They wrote: "always in the spotlight," "everyone watches you," and "you are always being watched (or feel like it)." Another stated, "I am totally watched. You know the expression 24/7, well with me it's 25/8. How I handle myself is what they're looking for: being calm, being able to manage conflict." One woman commented that she was constantly under scrutiny because it is "as if they are waiting for you to mess up. Sometimes I feel like I can't be a normal person and do what others are doing because people are waiting for me to fail." She and others felt that some members of her community were envious of her accomplishments and were waiting for an opportunity to put her down. Another commented, "Sometimes

people don't want to recognize your accomplishments for they are afraid of you getting ahead of them." The outcome of this perceived close observation was that these participants felt that they had to be on their "best behavior at all times in and out of the community and at home." Another commented: "I have to maintain and practice what I preach—always!"

The participants in this research told of their experiences as a role model, which involved acting as a credible leader in times of crisis for their local schools, as well as in more casual situations with community members. They were able to assume these leadership positions because they had knowledge, and they practiced the ideas they espoused. However, during the NTEP, some participants did have doubts about their ability to be a positive and effective role model. The benefits were the respect others showed them, the increase in their own self-esteem, and pride in knowing they had positively influenced others. The disadvantage was that some community members watched them closely and waited for them to make a mistake. Hence they had to be careful about their private and public behavior.

The NTEP and the Development of Role Models

Ten of the participants stated that the NTEP had helped them become a role model. It gave them knowledge about education, a vision of the possibilities for themselves and others, and an understanding of how to behave as a professional. For the two women who fought for their local schools, it was information they had gained through NTEP courses and resources that helped them craft the arguments for their causes. Others commented: "A lot of courses helped me understand our Native youth better," "I learned many ways to deal with conflict and teaching strategies," and "It taught me to treat everyone equally, especially the children."

These women were also proud of their achievements and spoke of the possibilities for themselves and others. One participant wrote, "NTEP has helped me set sight on my goals and dreams; my foot is in the door." Another stated, "I have a certificate stamped by a university, and this will be proof that others can achieve more as well." Others commented on the development of professionalism. One said, "When I came into the NTEP, I learned about professionalism. I said, 'You're an example. What they see you do is what *they're* going to do.'"

The participants reported that completing the NTEP gave them confidence. One commented that the NTEP made her a "stronger and more confident person both in my work and as a mother at home." Another woman said, "I used to sit back and let other people do the guiding … The NTEP gave me lots of confidence. I'm not afraid of speaking to anyone anymore." Two others reflected,

> The NTEP made my think differently. Before I was in the NTEP, it was easier to ignore the [social] problems. My own kids were doing all right. [But when I started volunteering at the school] it was hard to ignore the kids coming from the "party house" with no lunch and fall jackets in the middle of winter.

> When I am at the school, I had teachers and some of the educational officials [talk to me]. Complain, complain, complain. You get sick of it. My motto to them: quit your b****ing about the problem, find a solution to the problem.

> Then let's talk about solutions after you come up with at least three. It works for me. That's the type of person I have always been since enrolling in the NTEP. It gave me that confidence.

Hence enrollment in and completion of a university-level professional program gave these participants the knowledge and confidence they needed to take initiative in addressing problems and to act as leaders and role models in their communities.

Discussion

The participants in this research were attributed by others the status of being role models; they did not seek to become role models. During the two-year NTEP these women resolved issues and concerns related to this role and gradually became comfortable with it. Completion of the NTEP gave them knowledge, confidence, and a sense of social responsibility as they cared for their families and gave back to their communities (Jules, 1999). The participants described themselves as role models for the ideas of having higher expectations of yourself, for completing your education in order to become financially independent, supporting others in their educational pursuits, and for showing initiative and leadership in the area of social justice. The participants understood that improvement in each individual is beneficial to the whole community (Jacobs, 2004) and implicitly knew that their completion of the NTEP would result in strengthening their own communities.

The findings point to three stages in becoming a role model: unawareness, coping, and comfort. Some of the participants appeared to be unaware that others viewed them as a role model until they heard their comments. On accepting the status of being a role model, some struggled with the notion of perfection and how to cope with the surveillance and criticisms of others. All the women agreed that they had to act in socially appropriate ways because they chose to lead by example. They also wanted to avoid the criticism that awaited them if they failed in any way. Therefore, they felt pressured to be perfect. They coped by occasionally "breaking loose," keeping to themselves, and moving from the community. During the process of resolving these issues, the participants realized that role models do not have to be faultless and famous: they can be human, "home-grown and in your backyard." When this process was complete, the participants moved to the stage in which they were comfortable being a role model. By the end of the two-year NTEP, it appeared that all the participants were at this stage in becoming a role model. Moving from one phase to another may have been the outcome of conversations with others about being viewed as a role model (unawareness to coping) or how to manage the pressure of being a role model (coping to comfort). Therefore, the contribution of this research is that there are stages in becoming a role model, and certain types of events may act as catalysts in the transition from one phase to another. This is a topic that merits further investigation.

Unlike the NORTEP teachers and the 1999 NTEP graduates, the 2003 NTEP graduates did not mention that they wanted to model knowledge of their culture. It is possible that pride in being Native, using the language, and engaging in the cultural practices was a way of life for these women that had not been compromised by their education (Jacobs & Reyhner, 2002). In other

words, these participants could be both Native and educated. An important element of being a role model for the 2003 NTEP graduates was completing a university-level professional program. Being viewed as a person who actually did the things she espoused was important to others. One woman wanted to be seen as a person who accomplished things. She had served on band council, owned two businesses, and earned a teaching certificate from a university, which was proof to others that if she could do it, so could they. She was clearly a strong woman who was not afraid of success (Anderson, 2000; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003).

Native women traditionally were the teachers in the communities. However, they were mothers first and transferred their mothering skills to the workforce (Anderson, 2000). Some of the participants in this research, like the NORTEP teachers in an earlier study, wanted to demonstrate that work, motherhood, and community service could be managed successfully (Friesen & Orr, 1998). The older women participating in this study also wanted to tell the youth in their community that they should complete their education, find a job, then begin having a family. Two of the three women under 25 years had chosen this path for themselves. They were showing other young women that delaying childbearing until after they had completed their education, setting high expectations for themselves, and not giving up when obstacles arose was a possible way of life. All these women were blazing a new trail in terms of roles in their communities, as had the NORTEP graduates (Freisen & Orr). Two young women who delayed having children to pursue their careers and education had adopted the message of their older peers and were organizing their lives differently than most young women in their communities. The participants in this research wanted to model a way of life in which education was the first step toward independence and self-sufficiency, which for some may have been a new possibility. Therefore, because culture lives through word of mouth and example (Jacobs, 2004), these NTEP graduates may be opinion leaders (Rogers, 1983) who are on the leading edge of social change in Aboriginal communities.

Over the two-year period of the NTEP, the identities of these Native women expanded and changed. Many began the program as passive followers who accepted their traditional roles without question. As they immersed themselves in the work of learning how to teach, they became role models for their communities, teaching and leading by example. Identities were reconstructed to include being a role model by negotiating the context of the NTEP and through discourse with members of the community. At times their identities as role models seemed contradictory. On one hand, they were showing others that education was a means of empowering themselves and enriching the communities. But at the same time, they doubted their ability to be an effective role model and grappled with the issue of how a role model actually behaved on a day-to-day basis. Hence the NTEP provided a context for them to reconstruct their identity as Native women by resisting negative definitions of self; reclaiming their Native tradition as teachers; constructing a positive self-identity as knowledgeable, confident, and supportive people; and acting on that identity for the betterment of their communities (Anderson, 2000). That a teacher education program can support the reconstruction of identities among

the Native women who enroll in them advances our knowledge of identities and the circumstances in which they may change.

Implications

A finding of this study is that Native teacher education programs can provide a context for the development of role models among the candidates. Specifically, the participants in this study spoke of the knowledge gained through course work, which gave them the confidence to speak out against injustice. Following Smith-Mohamed's (1998) findings about role models for postsecondary Aboriginal students, professors and administrators of Native teacher education programs can support the development of role models by providing active and moral support to them when they feel overwhelmed and want to withdraw from the program. Specifically, extensions may be given to assignment deadlines, as one or two days can make a difference in terms of completing quality work. As well, moral support may be provided just by listening to the students and responding promptly to their e-mails during difficult times. Knowing when the students have hit that bump and helping them negotiate it is critical. While maintaining the quality of the program, administrators should also show some flexibility in order to ensure that these students graduate from the programs, as successful completion for these teachers appears to be an important element of being a role model.

Professors in Native teacher education programs should discuss with their students the topic of being a role model, specifically, the qualities of a role model, how to cope with the pressures, and the benefits of being a role model for their families and the community. In addition, students, professors, and administrators should engage in discussions on how these programs may promote the development of leadership qualities among Aboriginals with the view of incorporating these ideas into the educational experiences of the candidates.

The findings that emerged from this research advance our understanding of role models among Natives, particularly the experiences of women who are involved in the education sector. The development of positive role models among the graduates is an important outcome of this community-based Native teacher education program. As more Aboriginals place a positive value on organized education as a way of obtaining a well-paid job and financial independence, perhaps the leadership and role modeling these and other graduates have demonstrated will inspire others to believe that they too can achieve their goals and in doing so improve the quality of life in their communities.

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