

The Five R's for Indigenizing Online Learning: A Case Study of the First Nations Schools' Principals Course

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This article focuses on the creation, implementation, experiences, and research surrounding the first online professional development course for principals of First Nations schools across Canada, named the First Nations Schools' Principals Course (FNSPC). First, we describe the contexts, goals, and designing of the FNSPC. Second, we outline the complexities of bringing Indigenous values into an online educational space. Lastly, we describe how using the Five R's (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Restoule, 2008) of respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships recasts the challenges of Indigenizing online education into opportunities for spaces of traditional and non-traditional Indigenous learning through the FNSPC.

Keywords: Indigenous education; Aboriginal education; online education; First Nations schools on reserve; principals' professional development course

Introduction

In 2016, Dr. Jean-Paul Restoule, along with a team of researchers, undertook a research project exploring the experiences of the course planners, funding agencies, and participants of the First Nations Schools' Principals Course (FNSPC) during the phases of course design, implementation of a

one-year pilot delivery of the course, subsequent course offerings, and the move towards accreditation of the course by the Ontario College of Teachers. The research project is part of a larger Partnership Development Grant sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada and headed by Dr. Restoule.

This paper describes the story behind the FNSPC, its design and delivery, and provides some of the course experiences as examples. Notably, the course design and delivery were centred around the Five R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity, responsibility, and relationships (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Restoule, 2008). As such, the latter half of the paper reflects the centrality of the Five R's, with each R being discussed as it pertains to the FNSPC's design and research. The Five R's are highlighted as mitigators for the contentious task of incorporating Indigenous knowledge and learning into online environments, whereby core values of Indigenous education appear to conflict with the goals and uses of online education (Restoule, 2017; Styres & Zinga, 2013). A prime example of this conflict stems from Indigenous education usually being situated in a specific environment and community context (Restoule, 2017), whereas online education is accessible across multiple community or environmental contexts. Online education tends to be low context so that it can be consumed by any user, anywhere, whereas traditional Indigenous education is highly contextual (Hall, 1976). Castellano (2000) discusses numerous characteristics of Indigenous knowledge, including that it's experiential, holistic, personal, orally transmitted, and uses narrative and metaphor. Given that online education is transmitted through a computer or handheld device, the aforementioned characteristics of Indigenous knowledge are not readily incorporated in an online course. This paper further elucidates the tensions of Indigenous educational approaches in online learning environments, as well as the processes, experiences, and challenges of using e-learning as a vehicle for Indigenous knowledge.

After detailing some of the conflicting values of online and Indigenous education, the paper focuses on the steps taken by the FNSPC design and research teams in attempting to overcome the challenges of creating and delivering an online course for First Nations schools' principals. Each of the Five R's (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Restoule, 2008) are detailed for their role in course design and delivery as a means of ensuring culturally appropriate and meaningful learning experiences, and for how they can serve as useful tools for educators going forward across a range of contexts: from those working in First Nations schools, to those designing online courses, or simply for those who are interested in Indigenizing learning environments.

Methodology

This article is based on the experiences of those involved in the FNSPC as course designers, funders, teachers, and participants. These experiences have been documented and collected as part of a research project beginning after the first FNSPC offering and that is still underway. Specifically, the research seeks to collect information from FNSPC participants, instructors, and others involved in the course to improve future offerings of the course, as well as to contribute to the bodies of knowledge surrounding Indigenous education, First Nations schools, and Indigenizing online education. To collect the experiences and perspectives of persons and groups involved in the FNSPC, various qualitative methods were used; thus far, the research has included document analysis, interviews, and surveys.

Surveys were created on an online platform and used to collect data from FNSPC pilot participants. Surveys inquired as to participants' opinions on what worked in the course, what did not, what they found most valuable as school principals, and how they communicated with other participants during and after the course, if applicable. The surveys were sent several months after course completion to determine what aspects continued to inform the participants' work. The data from the surveys supplemented data from two days of focus groups, held with pilot participants immediately following their course completion. The pilot participants were selected to represent regions and schools from across Canada, and they were invited with the request that they evaluate the course while participating as learners. A notable exclusion in the course participation was the northern territories. Participants were drawn from schools in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Quebec, and Nova Scotia.

Significance of the FNSPC

In 2014, the Martin Family Initiative approached the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) with the aim of creating an online course for principals of First Nations schools across Canada. Dr. Restoule became the Indigenous curriculum design lead and worked with experts in educational leadership to design the course. The idea for an online course was inspired by the pressing need for enhancing school leadership in areas where professional development opportunities are scarce, particularly leadership development for those working in a First Nations cultural context. The partners at both the Martin Family Initiative and OISE were acutely aware of the impact that could result for First Nations schools in developing the skills and capacity of school leaders. According to Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004), "leadership not only

matters: it is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning” (p. 3).

Given the allotted funding, it was decided that the course should focus on the professional development and leadership capacity of the First Nations schools’ principals. By doing so, the course would be able to directly and indirectly impact the workspaces and education of the highest number of people through each principal’s school and relevant sphere of influence. Notably, research shows that effective educational leaders, especially principals, are a factor in high-performing First Nations schools and First Nations student success (Bell, 2004; Fulford, 2007). First Nations schools pose unique and often challenging circumstances for principals; therefore, a course designed specifically to enhance their leadership capabilities serves to benefit not only the principals but also the schools and broader community.

Although there are exceptions, many principals of First Nations schools experience the additional challenges of being in remote locations; having higher turnover of teaching staff; serving dual goals of delivering provincial curriculum plus local culture and language; being in communities with higher per capita rates of intergenerational trauma, substance abuse, violence, and suicides; and having additional reporting and accountability mechanisms while receiving less per student funding than their provincial counterparts (Khan, 2008; Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer, 2016). These principals may or may not be First Nations people and are often not from the same community where they are working. They often do not have the same amount of additional training that a public school system principal has and most prior existing principal development courses do not take into account the distinctive circumstances of First Nations schools. The course was designed with these conditions in mind.

The Martin Family Initiative sought to create an online version of the FNSPC, with a similar number of hours and work (usually 180 to 250 hours) in a typical principal’s development course or program. To bring the FNSPC course to fruition, an expert advisory panel composed of 22 members met with a course design team at OISE on two occasions. The expert panel consisted of some of Canada’s leading educators, curriculum developers, academics, and principals, including several recognized for their success leading First Nations schools. After the panel and design team’s deliberation, the course was designed as a 200-hour, 10-month course that would be ready to launch in 2015.

The primary advantage of an online version of the FNSPC is aligned with that of all online courses: the breaking down of geographical barriers

for participation and the possibility of completing the course from any distance. Essentially, the advantage of any online course is its accessibility. For the FNSPC group, the offering of the course through digital means was the best way to ensure diverse participation since First Nations schools are spread all across Canada, many in remote locations. By having the course available online, participants could remain active in their daytime principal roles while working on the course during their spare time.

During the design process, it was understood that the course would require extremely careful and thoughtful planning so as to ensure meaningful spaces for cultural and contextual relevance, community development, and decolonization. The creation of the course specifically for principals of First Nations schools and to be delivered online presented an enormous opportunity for new modes of representing Indigenous knowledge and understandings of Indigenous learning.

FNSPC Research

Given the course's unique parameters, the course design team recognized that the experiences of the persons involved in the FNSPC—from the funders, to the creators, instructors, and participants—could serve as useful knowledge not only for future offerings of the course but also for understanding online spaces for Indigenous knowledge and learning. As such, a research project was designed to better understand and document the pedagogical experiences of the FNSPC, from its development, to its offerings, and its lasting impact on course participants.

FNSPC research employed a decolonizing theoretical approach as well as Indigenous research methodologies, informed and inspired by the work of scholars such as Linda Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999) and Shawn Wilson in *Research is Ceremony* (2008). These frameworks meant that, similar to the course design, the research approach ought to be culturally aligned and based on respectful relationships (Styres & Zinga, 2013).

A research team of five members was assembled, consisting of four members of the design team, Dr. Restoule, and a research-stream doctoral student. Danielle Tessaro, a graduate student of Italian heritage, has pursued coursework and research on Indigenous environmental well-being and decolonizing education. Dr. Restoule, who is Anishinaabe and French-Canadian, was raised in a small town northwest of Toronto. Connecting to his Indigenous heritage in his early twenties, Dr. Restoule worked for a number of urban Indigenous community organizations in Windsor and Toronto. His research on urban Indigenous identity development led to over 20 years of participation in research with Indigenous people in many areas, including access to post-secondary education, decolonizing teacher

education, and fostering leadership in HIV prevention messaging. Along with Dr. Restoule and Ms. Tessaro as the two lead authors, the co-authors Carlana Lindeman, Patricia Gaviria, Joseph Flessa, and Coleen Scully-Stewart were members of both the FNSPC design and research teams.

For the FNSPC research, data collection commenced after the course's pilot year and included new data from course participants through surveys and interviews as well as existent data from coursework and the self-reflections of the designers and instructors. The goals of the research included understanding the challenges and opportunities of incorporating Indigenous knowledge into spaces of online education, the findings of which are discussed by Restoule (2017). Research also explored the ways that the course could provide new e-learning opportunities to invite all learners to engage with Indigenous knowledges, worldviews, and pedagogies in culturally appropriate, respectful, and meaningful ways.

Ultimately, the FNSPC research addresses a significant gap in the literature. While there is voluminous context available for understanding the professional development of teachers (Cranton, 1996; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Guskey & Huberman, 1995), there is significantly less for that of principals (Gross, 2009; Rowland, 2017). Moreover, since the FNSPC was the first online course for principals of First Nations schools with national scope and reach, there is limited research that has been done on a course similar to the FNSPC. The project thereby addresses the need for such research, including the need for more research drawing from the voices of school principals (Prothero, 2015). Further, the project is not only significant for its contribution to understandings of a professional development course for First Nations schools' principals; it also significant in that it is offered online, an aspect requiring unique contemplation and understanding.

Indigenizing Online Education

The decision to explore the processes and outcomes of the FNSPC is based on the knowledge that the content and delivery of these courses is inherently conflictual due to the opposing fundamentals of Indigenous education versus online education. Indigenous pedagogy emphasizes teaching and learning as immersed in community, place, and context (Cajete, 1994; Hall, 1976) and customized by the teacher around an intimate awareness of the learner (Styres & Zinga, 2013). Indigenous education is meant to engage each person on a holistic level, involving the emotional, intellectual, spiritual, and physical aspects of their being (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane, 1984; Cajete, 1994). The relationship a learner has to the teacher, community, and place where the learning occurs is of such great

importance in Indigenous education that the community and environment tend to be synonymous with the sources and content of learning.

In successful Indigenous education approaches, teacher and learner often have knowledge of each other's backgrounds, capacities, and learning experiences, thus enabling teachers to tailor lessons accordingly. This approach is in stark contrast to online education where teacher and learner may never know one another. Pedagogy for online education is not situated in one place, community, or context but meant to be accessed beyond the confines of one geographical space. In some ways, the virtual space of the online classroom can mean that the learning is rather place-less. Furthermore, the knowledge transfer in online settings is usually low context to allow for any user to easily access material and interact with the course shell. For online education, community is often a virtual construct where communication takes place through a computer or handheld screen, meaning all interactions are mediated (Restoule, 2017).

As previously noted, the opposing values of Indigenous versus online education meant that the FNSPC had to be carefully designed and implemented, which is where the Five R's (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Restoule, 2008) became essential tools. Prior to the detailing of the context and application of each R, this section describes the structure and content of the FNSPC. Through its 10 modules, the course trajectory was designed to move from the exploration of principals' relationship with self, to the school, to school community, and then to structures beyond the community. This trajectory was based on the philosophy that a person needs to understand and know self in order to relate to others. As such, the course's early modules centre on the exploration of one's own assumptions about the role of principal. Following these early modules, the course situates the principal in their relationship to their respective First Nations school and the school community, including staff, teachers, students, and parents. The next layer of modules was very practical, offering guided activities and resources to manage First Nations school improvement. The final modules were focused on nurturing a school culture of support and well-being, while keeping students at the centre. A list of the original modules is as follows:

- Module 1: Principal as leader—Who am I?
- Module 2: What's my role and who's the team?
- Module 3: What are our school resources and how can we use them?
- Module 4: How to manage the school?
- Module 5: What are strategies for meaningful school organization?
- Module 6: How can I improve my school?
- Module 7: How can data be used for school improvement?

Module 8: How can students be supported?

Module 9: How can school, family, and community relationships be nurtured?

Module 10: How can we make a positive difference for our students?

Every module was organized around a query concerning principals' everyday experiences, and activities and resources were organized to support exploration of the query. Discussion forums and online journal entries as assignments were incorporated to further explore each module's query. In this sense, the material became living knowledge through principals' narrated experience. Additionally, the delivery of the modules was asynchronous. There was a timeline for each module's completion and check-in points to assure everyone's engagement. Every discussion post and journal entry was reviewed by course instructors or facilitators, which encouraged further participation and nurtured relationships.

An example of a core activity was the practicum project where participants were requested to consider and work on school improvement. They presented their proposals to FNSPC instructors in Module 6 and, from then on, met with instructors to shape their practicums. Participants presented their practicums in a final forum where members of the advisory panel were also present. The idea of creating a network of First Nations schools nationwide emerged from these presentations. Here, the notion of relationships played a significant role in the course structure and outcomes, which demonstrates a key component of the interplay of one of the Five R's.

The Five R's

In this paper, we refer to the Five R's, originally described as the Four R's by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001). The Four R's are respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. The fifth R of relationships was added over time in works such as those by Harris and Wasilewski (2004), Restoule (2008), and Styres and Zinga (2013). The fifth R is included here as it underpins all aspects of course and research design. By applying each R to the course design, structure, and delivery, it was found that the challenges of bridging Indigenous and online education could be effectively mitigated and these could act instead as opportunities for new types of learning. That's not to say that the course ran without any hiccups but by conducting the research, gathering course feedback, and respecting the input of course participants, each challenge could be learned from and adapted for future offerings. After providing context for the conception of the Four R's (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001), the paper outlines how each R played a role in the FNSPC or the research that surrounded it.

The Four R's were outlined by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) as a response to institutional approaches towards Indigenous university students. Problematically, institutional approaches centred on the ideas that Indigenous students would fare best if well-integrated into the schooling system and well-adapted to university values, with the ultimate goal of retaining First Nations students until graduation. Such approaches can be likened to a form of assimilation, requiring that First Nations students distance themselves from their traditional community values, at least while at university. The institutional approaches that focus on First Nations students adapting to school's values are ineffective and have only perpetuated the poor retention rates for these students (Willett, 2007; Huffman, 2008).

The Four R's (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001) demonstrate an alternative to the typical university approach. Here, education should accommodate and adapt to First Nations students and Indigenous knowledge and learning, instead of the other way around. For Harris and Wasilewski (2004), the Four R's are critical components of Indigenous learning as opposed to the "Two P's" of "Power and Profit" that tend to inform dominant institutional practice. Since their inception by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001), the Four R's have been revisited by scholars and program developers as core foundations for Indigenous education (Wimmer, 2016; White, 2013) and would serve well to become a staple for universities across Canada and elsewhere. Here, we describe each R and how it has been applied through the creation and implementation of the FNSPC and, where applicable, the outcomes of each R as indicated by the FNSPC research project.

Respect

In the context of the Five R's, respect refers to the need to recognize and respect First Nations cultural norms and values (Harris & Wasilewski, 2004; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Restoule, 2008; Styres & Zinga, 2013). Importantly, Indigenous worldviews are holistic, meaning that hierarchies and separation between beings are not inherent (Dove, Campos, Mathews, Meitzner Yoder, Rademacher, Rhee, & Smith, 2003). For Indigenous cultures, a holistic worldview encompasses attitudes towards nature, community, and education (Gill, 2002). Therefore, universities can be a cultural mismatch for First Nations people within a bureaucratic, highly-structured, and hierarchical system. That being said, while still needing to engage in the requirements of a bureaucratic and structured organization, such as requiring assignment submission and evaluation, the design of the FNSPC sought respect by remaining respectful of the cultural context of the community where each course participant was working. For example, course content stressed that

principals use culturally appropriate curriculum and assessment. This meant that the material chosen for the course was written by First Nations authors and educators wherever possible. Video recorded interviews with Indigenous educators, academics, and Elders were also incorporated. Coursework via activities and assignments sought to have participants immerse themselves in local experiences and traditions, to ensure learning experiences that were respectful of local culture.

The FNSPC was also designed with a capacity to incorporate participant feedback, which speaks to the respect for the local community's values and perspectives instead of the expectation that students accept and adapt to a strict curriculum. Balancing the need to provide transferable leadership skills that apply to any principal while enhancing the ability of principals to work with their respective communities was a key course design challenge. Thus, the design team attempted to provide widely applicable content by creating activities that required respect for local realities. For instance, one activity included connecting with a community member and seeing the school through their eyes. Another assessed the school's learning spaces and documented how much cultural symbolism, language, and artwork was visible. Instructors would then collect individual reflections and share their insights, pose further questions, recommend assignments, or suggest peer interaction on specific issues. One participant reflected on her/his challenges with upward bullying in First Nations schools. The instructor recommended posting that reflection in the discussion forum. Upon consent, the reflection was posted. Fellow participants shared their experiences and resources. Upward bullying in First Nations schools was then introduced as a topic in the next iteration of the course.

Several additional aspects of the course were redesigned based on data gathered from pilot participants via surveys, email conversations, and video chats. For instance, sequencing and pacing of modules was modified to account for time constraints, with some modules moved to align with school calendars. Reflection spaces per module were reduced, such as lessening the journal requirements to one entry at the end of each module. An additional change was introducing videos from the pilot and various other resources as main activities. Finally, whereas the pilot had staggered considerations of the practicum, the post-pilot course changed such that the practicum was introduced more comprehensively at the beginning of the course; this enabled participants to consider the practicum from a more cumulative perspective from the start of the course so the flow of learning would not be interrupted later on.

For the pilot, a course-wide video check-in was to take place only once at the course's halfway point. However, based on pilot participant feed-

back, subsequent offerings have included video chat rooms at the start of each module. Participant data from surveys and conversations demonstrate that participants benefit from seeing each other in real time more frequently. Another change in subsequent offerings resulting from participant feedback was the posting and releasing of modules only at certain times. The first offering had all of the modules posted at the start to allow participants to move at their own pace but this meant some participants were soon further ahead than others. The change to the timed release of the modules was then made to ensure all participants worked through the modules at approximately the same time, to aim for optimal participation. All these inputs demonstrate to the researchers that critical reflection and adaptation, based on course feedback, should be an essential component for designing and redesigning spaces of Indigenous learning. The changes also reflect the element of respect: respect of participant opinions, circumstances, and perspectives.

Reciprocity

Indigenous scholars underline the significance of reciprocity as imperative for Indigenous research (Absolon, 2011; Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Emphasis on reciprocity for Indigenous research is a result of decades of First Nations exploitation by researchers and their institutions (Smith, 1999). Histories of exploitative research are borne by one-sided projects that simply aim to accomplish academic milestones while often ignoring the goals and concerns of the community (Sunseri, 2007). Reciprocity means that research must be mutually beneficial to researcher and participants instead of solely to the researcher (First Nations Centre, 2005; Wilson, 2008).

The same emphasis on reciprocity is applied as being fundamental to Indigenous education. Reciprocity should frame course design and relationships between instructor and pupil. Student voices should be actively listened to, and their needs and goals should be accommodated. For Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001):

the emphasis is on making teaching and learning two-way processes, in which the give-and-take between faculty and students opens up new levels of understanding for everyone. Such reciprocity is achieved when the faculty member makes an effort to understand and build upon the cultural background of the students, and the students are able to gain access to the inner-workings of the culture (and the institution) to which they are being introduced. (p. 11)

Reciprocity was integral to FNSPC course design, underlining relationships between instructor and participant as well as between participant and their relevant schools and communities. Instead of a transmission model of teaching, where the instructor imparts information to a passive

student, the FNSPC incorporated many elements of horizontal sharing (Avalos, 2011) among course participants. Furthermore, two of the 10 modules were designed to be held face-to-face. Initial planning discussions saw the course as being entirely online and portable, able to be offered at any institution after the pilot evaluation. However, when designing the course and in discussion with the expert advisory panel, these plans changed. Instead, it was deemed necessary to first build community among participants and instructors in person, given the pilot participants' additional role as course evaluators. Meeting in person would also aid in the fostering of a cohort mentality for shared support. As a result of these intentions, the first module of the pilot was delivered in person at OISE over two and a half days. During this time, the group discussed their dual responsibility: they were participating as students while simultaneously evaluating the course. For instance, as a monthly course task, participants evaluated each module's content and pedagogy. Ultimately, having the in-person meeting in the first month allowed FNSPC instructors, planners, and participants to be clear about the expectations and mutual obligations to each other.

The second face-to-face module was also the course closing. Participants were brought back to OISE to present their final capstone project, receive completion certificates, and provide a final round of evaluative comments on the course. At this get-together, instructors were able to ask more global questions about the course experience. This style of critical reflection on and adaption of the course was used throughout the pilot year. A great example of the responsiveness to participant feedback happened at the halfway point. Module 6 was designed to be a synchronous videoconference session where the cohort and design team could all check in and discuss the capstone assignment. Participants found meeting synchronously so valuable that it was requested for each of the remaining modules. The course facilitator and project manager then arranged multiple videoconference sessions each month to ensure everyone had time for a check-in. This mode of meeting was carried into subsequent offerings.

Again, alternative to a passive model, for the FNSPC knowledge is transferred both ways between participant and instructor. Following the pilot course, instructors were asked to reflect on their experiences and to use these as well as participant commentary to redesign components of the course for future offerings. Changes for future offerings included more video interviews with principals from across Canada and more focus on the most useful readings as described by the principals in the FNSPC survey results.

Additionally, principals were asked to show reciprocity towards their school and community, to contribute to their betterment following the course. The practicum or capstone activity entailed "giving-back" to the

school. The design team considered the high turnover rate of staff in First Nations schools and was concerned about inadvertently designing a course that would lead exclusively to one individual's development, with the school not necessarily benefiting from the course skills and knowledge. Therefore, the final assignment was intended to stay with the school, and continue to service the students and staff even if the principal left. This goal was explained in the course introduction and participants shared prospective topics during Modules 1 and 6, receiving feedback and guidance from instructors to ensure the topics gave back to the school or community. Admittedly, not much steering was required since pilot participants were already strongly committed to the thriving of their schools and communities.

Relevance

The centrality of bettering the principals' schools and communities is also pertinent to the third R: relevance. As part of the Five R's, learning should be relevant to First Nations culture and ways of knowing, which means going beyond books (Goody, 1982; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). Learning that is relevant to First Nations culture should be based typically in community and oral communication. As an online course across a range of First Nation communities, and where communication takes place over a computer, a culturally relevant course meant that the FNSPC designers had to get creative. Beyond the group-wide meetings of the pilot course, video chat rooms, video lectures, and other forms of online repositied videos were relied on as oral communication and comprised a significant portion of course engagement. To ensure basis in community, which is an important component of Indigenous knowledge and learning (Castellano, 2000), tasks and assignments included hands-on activities within the school and community. One example of such an activity required participants to reach out to a community member not regularly engaged in school activities and to tour the school with that person, asking the guest to comment on their impressions of the school. Principals received an assessment of how culturally relevant the school appeared to a community member, how welcoming it was, and how representative it was of local First Nations culture, language, and arts.

A concern around relevance for the design team was the attempt to align course modules with activities that typically arise for a First Nations school principal over the course of an academic year. As all principals would have to engage with the nominal roll reporting process in the fall, the course module that contained tips and support around this process was placed in the overall course sequencing to align with the time a little before

the roll was due in the principals' actual schedule. By doing so, the learning aligned with the duty, informing the principals' work as they were taking the course. Rather than approach course participation as an activity that is wholly external to their working lives, the design team sought to ensure that the course enabled and assisted the professionals in carrying out their roles and responsibilities. Therefore, learning was directly relevant to the First Nations schools, local contexts, and the daily work of the principal. Ultimately, relevance played a significant role in course design and delivery, informing course material and assignment choices that could speak to the principals' daily lives, school environments, and communities instead of being based solely on theory and books.

Responsibility

In Indigenous education, both the teacher and learner have a responsibility to recognize and uphold First Nations values, practices, and ways of knowing (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001). Further, personal responsibilities and relationships, such as to family members, work, or community, are acknowledged for their role in the functioning of society and the shaping of daily experiences. Thus, responsibility to culture and to various aspects of being was an essential component of the FNSPC.

The course incorporated responsibility in multiple ways and through multiple relationships. As discussed, this was partially demonstrated by principals upholding their responsibilities to First Nations culture, which was achieved through course assignments and tasks to be completed directly within their communities and schools. The course fostered the responsibilities of the participants as principals and equipped them with the tools and resources to engage further into the areas of school and community. Additionally, the flexibility of the online course allowed participants to both maintain and develop their responsibilities as principals, family members, and community members. As such, the course was able to highlight the responsibilities of the principals to their schools, local cultures, and student needs.

While responsibility towards Indigenous culture and ways of knowing is essential, for Indigenous education, the application of this fundamental R to a university setting is nuanced by the additional responsibility of meeting institutional needs and requirements. This became pertinent for the FNSPC whereby responsibility to its home institution, OISE, and to its funders could not be ignored. While seeking to remain as culturally relevant as possible, the FNSPC design still had to meet the requirements of an OISE course via enrolment and assignment deadlines, structures, grades, and written components. In fact, the FNSPC is currently undergoing an accred-

itation process whereby it is being evaluated by the Ontario College of Teachers. To be accredited, which will be of added value to future participants, the responsibility towards institutional standards is especially emphasized as a necessity. In this way, the course could not be wholly decolonizing, since underlying course requirements are still derived from the colonial schooling system, to which the FNSPC designers and instructors have some responsibility to uphold as part of their work.

Similarly, the principals of the First Nations schools, while expected to immerse themselves into local contexts and culture, are responsible to uphold certain school organizational structures and requirements that are also derived from beyond local contexts. As such, working on ways to navigate responsibilities to institutions of the Canadian schooling system was part of the FNSPC's content and these components were appreciated by participants, according to FNSPC data collected through interviews and surveys. Therefore, for the FNSPC, the idea of responsibility is multifaceted: responsibility of the course to respect First Nations values; the personal responsibilities of the participants to their families, schools, and communities; and the responsibilities to conventional school standards.

Relationships

Relationships are the fifth R, as the other Four R's of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and responsibility can only truly be realized through conscious tending and effort to relationships. Relationships between teacher and learner, and between community, culture, and school underlie all aspects of Indigenous education (Restoule, 2017). Relationships are meant to be reciprocal on behalf of teacher and pupil, and education should foster growth of personal relationships to community. In a school setting, relationships between the students themselves also need to be fostered.

The significance of relationships was recognized by the course design team and panel of experts prior to the creation of the FNSPC. As such, assignments were designed to encourage the principals to examine and fortify relationships with teachers, students, family members, the local community, and the land. For instance, as part of the pre-course module, the principals were required to share a photo of the place where they live and work, and to share a story about its personal meaning. The idea was to have them reflect on the meaning of place and their relationship to it. Further, the necessity of participants to form relationships with each other and with instructors was part of the rationale behind the preliminary meetings at OISE. The first module of the course also focused on community and relationship building, again due to an understanding of the significance of relationships for Indigenous learning.

While these aspects of relationships were planned for, the FNSPC pilot fostered relationships in unexpected ways. For online courses, direct communication can be seldom and is often limited to forums or discussion rooms within the course website. In these settings, communication tends to remain planned and formal or even viewed as something required and only associated with assignments. This lack of direct interaction can act as a barrier for student-student relationships in an online course.

Such was not the case for the FNSPC. Surprisingly, relationship building between the participants was one of its greatest successes. In some of the conversations in person and online during the pilot course, as well as in interviews for the FNSPC research, many participants indicated that their daily work as principals tends to be rather lonely. At work, each principal must operate as an individual and maintain a sense of neutrality amongst their staff and students, and also when representing the school to the community and to parents. The daily encounters of a principal can be very challenging, and the inability to casually debrief and discuss these challenges with their peers only adds to feelings of isolation. For principals working in First Nations contexts, this loneliness can be heightened by the specificities of the role, remoteness of schools, and the added challenges of being members of small and tight-knit communities (Restoule, 2017). Based on feedback obtained through the FNSPC research via interviews and surveys, participants expressed that the FNSPC provided them with a valuable network of fellow principals. What's more, this group of principals was unified for the first time as a group specifically from First Nations schools, a rare source of common ground. The FNSPC's connecting of this network was and is invaluable to the principals.

As such, friendships and support networks developed and, instead of being limited by online mediums, ongoing communication between the participants in remote areas was enabled. For instance, during the course participants reached out to each other outside of the confines of the course forums, such as by email, text, or other messaging applications. Following the course, as part of the FNSPC research, participants were asked via survey or interview about their reasons for communication with other participants. Responses included following up on in-course commentary and on stories about personal experiences as principals that were told during the group-wide video conferences. Essentially, it was indicated that communication external to course platforms was used to offer support and that relationships with one another were fostered from there. Thus, while relationships underlined components of course design and planning, the significance of relationships for the FNSPC was much greater than expected.

Conclusion

At first glance, online education can appear to conflict with the ideals of Indigenous learning by virtue of its being tied to no particular location along with other characteristics such as the removal of intimate, face-to-face teacher-learner interaction. At the same time, there are surprising opportunities afforded by its enhanced accessibility and removal of geographical distances. Where Indigenous education is tied to oral communication, context, community, and land, an online learning community is a virtual construct, where communication is mediated by technological interface. The opposition between the two types of learning could have stopped the creation of the FNSPC in its tracks. Instead, by focusing on the Five R's of respect, reciprocity, relevance, responsibility, and relationships, the potential challenges of the FNSPC as an online offering were not only mitigated—they were turned into strengths.

Overall, FNSPC participants and instructors indicated that the course was a valuable learning experience. Due to the success of the pilot year as built around the Five R's, the course has been offered two more times with full enrolment and a growing waitlist. Seeking to provide additional incentives for aspiring principals to take the course, the design team sought accreditation for the FNSPC. When a rationale was brought to the Ontario College of Teachers, they struggled to evaluate the course as it did not fit neatly into existing categories. Since the course is unique, a new category for its evaluation had to be created. Serving as reviewers of guidelines for a professional development course for principals working in First Nations contexts, members of the design team put forward the Five R's framework as a way of ensuring First Nations cultures and communities are included with respect, responsibility, reciprocity, and relevance. Notably, based on the work of the FNSPC research group, the application of the Five R's will become an essential component for all First Nations schools' principals courses going forward and is now becoming part of the accreditation requirements. The adaptation of the Five R's framework by the Ontario College of Teachers is not only a sign of success for the FNSPC but for Indigenous education as a whole.

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