

Introduction

Teaching languages to the Indigenous peoples of Canada is a very complex issue, both historically and politically. This article describes a participatory action research on an alternative teaching method of French language using oral-based Indigenous literacies. The aim of this research process was to decolonize a teaching method for vocabulary acquisition and to encourage the retention of Indigenous knowledge in a context where students need to master the dominant language, in this case French. This project aims to use Indigenous knowledge and multiliteracies pedagogy principles as a stepping stone for teaching French language more effectively to Innu children. This participatory action research took place with two kindergarten teachers in collaboration with elders, parents and children from the Innu community of Unamen Shipu in Quebec, Canada. In order to understand both the issues facing teachers of Indigenous people today and the means of addressing the importance of the decolonization of teaching methods, a brief review of the colonial history of Canada and Quebec is essential. The specific historical conditions and events shaping the lives of the Innu¹ people of Unamen Shipu, the participants in this study, will be highlighted.

Before European settlers arrived in the 16th and 17th centuries, Indigenous instruction involved elders teaching by example and sharing their knowledge (Roy, 2007). Tales, legends and stories were the primary means of teaching (McMullen & Rohrbach, 2003). Teaching was deeply rooted within the community and was based on holistic principles of life-long learning, focusing on the spiritual, cultural, political, social, economic and intellectual development of the individual and the community (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). The purpose of the first schools was to Christianize and “civilize” the Indigenous peoples in accordance with Western social norms. At

¹ In the text, the name “Innu” is used instead of the name “Montagnais,” as this refers to the name given by the Europeans for the people living north of the St. Lawrence River, east of Quebec City, straddling the Quebec-Labrador border. Moreover, the author would like to make clear that the Innu and Inuit are two different groups.

that time, the Innu people of Unamen Shipu used the Olomane River, from the Saint Lawrence River to its headwaters in Labrador, to fulfill their needs depending on the seasons. At the end of summer, they would leave the coast and go upriver to hunt and fish during the winter. Around the end of the 17th century, this tradition was targeted, as settlement and Francization of the Indigenous peoples became part of the mission of the schools. In the early eighteenth century, the French colonists opened a fishing station and a trading post for the Unamen Shipu community at the mouth of the Olomane River. The trading post became a meeting place for Innu and European settlers. The British took control of the station in the 1760s and were followed by merchants from Quebec City. Around 1850, a few French Canadians from other parts of the province began settling in Unamen Shipu. Up until the mid-1950s, when they were forced to settle in villages, the Innu of Unamen Shipu maintained their customs. The Innu of the Lower North Shore were one of the last Aboriginal groups in North America to live off the land by hunting and fishing, following the seasonal food source.

In 1867, the *British North America Act* assigned responsibility for Indigenous education to the federal government of Canada. In 1876, the government adopted the *Indian Act*, which acknowledges the specific status of Indigenous peoples relative to other cultural minorities in Canada based on treaties signed with the Crown. It acknowledges the agreement made between settlers and First Nations for a moderate livelihood on their own lands in exchange of safe settlements. The *Indian Act* also states government's obligation and responsibilities, such as providing education to First Nations. After this Act, the number of government-run residential schools increased, with the express objective of "killing the Indian in the child" (Picard, 2011; p. 11). Government cut off Indigenous children from their families and this traditional lifestyle. Many teachers, who were mostly priests, physically abused these children. This dark page in

Canadian history is still a current topic, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission² has revealed the extent of the physical and psychological violence that Indigenous peoples and their children were subjected to by their teachers (Assemblée nationale, 2007). The formal apologies of the Canadian government, made in 2008, for the abuse Indigenous children were subjected to in residential schools, offered no solution to the ongoing decline in numbers of speakers of Indigenous languages (Atleo & Fitznor, 2010). Very few schools in Quebec use Indigenous languages for instruction, in spite of the legal provisions enabling them to do so (OQLF, 1977, Article 97). The residential schools contributed to this lack of recognition of Indigenous languages in schools. In addition, residential schools seriously affected family cohesion and the transmission of family traditions between generations, leading to increased mistrust of education (Hare & Anderson, 2010). Fortunately, Indigenous identity is still alive, as are the movements toward self-determination³ and language revitalization programs (Richards & Maracle, 2002; Sarkar & Metallic, 2009; Sioui, Picard & Dorais, 2008). Although very few Indigenous languages are used in schools, some 60 Indigenous languages are still spoken in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2011). The vitality of Indigenous languages varies immensely among the different First Nation, Inuit and Métis groups and from community to community within a given group. For example, the Innu Nation⁴ includes nine communities with a combined population of over 10,000 people. According to the last Statistics Canada census conducted in 2011, more than 8,000 of the 10,000 Innu regularly spoke *Innu Aimun* at home. These figures seem encouraging initially, but when we look at the number of *Innu Aimun* speakers by community, we see that the language has almost vanished in two communities, bilingualism prevails in two other communities, and in the remaining five communities, almost everyone speaks *Innu Aimun*. This varied sociolinguistic

² To learn more about this Commission: <http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=15>

³ The author refers to the Idle No More Movement: <http://idlenomore.ca/>

situation makes it impossible to set up a single model for teaching languages even within the same Indigenous nation.

Languages used at school among the Innu of Unamen Shipu. The Innu community of Unamen Shipu is one of the five geographically isolated communities where *Innu Aimun* is the language used at home. Children from Unamen Shipu speak Innu as their first language, but they receive education in French. They follow the same program as other students in Quebec (MELS, 2001), with the exception of certain hours spent studying the Innu language. During primary school, they receive 3.5 hours of Innu instruction per week, but Innu is not taught in secondary school. For pre-school children under five years old, the community uses an immersive model in which 50% of instructional time is in French and 50% is in Innu. This situation obliges the students of Unamen Shipu, like many other Indigenous children in Quebec, to rely on a second language to successfully complete their education. In addition to the linguistic barrier, the French-language curriculum proposed by MELS (2001) generally lacks adequate references to Innu culture, environment and spiritual traditions.

With this as the specific sociolinguistic and historical backdrop, this article presents an example of the development of a pedagogical process for teaching French vocabulary to Indigenous peoples based on a framework of Indigenous knowledge and multiliteracies.

Conceptual Framework

This study is set within an Indigenous knowledge (IK) framework. One of the goals of the IK framework is to offer Indigenous-informed vocabulary teaching methods. The IK literature clearly indicates that Indigenous peoples have their own ways of knowing, being, valuing and living in this world (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). Moreover IK is recognized in the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nation, 2007). Article 14 of this Declaration asserts

that IK is a right enabling Indigenous peoples to control their educational system and provide education in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. When this right is not respected, the educational success of children can be compromised. Hare (2012) observes that when the language and literacy experiences children have within their families and communities differ from the literacy expectations and practices of formal schools, children do not do well. In research on second language vocabulary instruction, respecting the literacy practices of the learner is not a new concept (Heath, 1983). The concepts of IK and multiliteracies pedagogy (MP) thus form the theoretical basis of this article.

Indigenous Knowledge. IK is based on the values of respect, reciprocity, reverence and responsibility (Archibald, 2008, Smith, 2003). With regard to language instruction for Indigenous peoples, IK scholars suggest giving the role of teacher back to the elders (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Bell, 2004; Ortiz, 2009). The Canadian Council of Learning (2009) also recognizes that, in Indigenous contexts, knowledge and languages are taught through social relationships, thus emphasizing the role of family, elders and community as important sources of knowledge. When the teachers are not themselves elders, it has been argued that Indigenous teachers have a critical role to play in developing culturally responsive schooling for their young people by balancing languages, cultures and worldviews in the curriculum (Battiste, 2000; Castano & Brayboy, 2008). IK returns control of knowledge development to the members of Indigenous communities (Ball, 2004; Bell, 2004). IK is an intellectual position that encourages self-determination and empowerment in contemporary educational institutions (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). In this regard, Armstrong (2013) raises the possibility of using storytelling as a decolonized method. Further, Hare (2012) points out that oral storytelling in the Indigenous context promotes oral language development, comprehension and listening skills, as well as

introducing young Indigenous children to different forms of narrative. Storytelling, using narrative-based content, serves as a traditional teaching method and is particularly relevant to Indigenous children and families (McKeough et al., 2008; Timmons et al., 2006).

Indigenous knowledge in vocabulary teaching. Although stories are not read, but rather told in Indigenous contexts, a parallel can be made with studies on second language teaching that show that learners can pick up new vocabulary while listening to stories if certain conditions occur. The main conditions are:

interest in the content of the story, comprehension of the story, understanding of the unknown words and retrieval of the meaning of those not yet strongly established, decontextualization of the targeted words, and thoughtful generative processing of the targeted vocabulary (Nation, 2001, p. 118).

Interest. The most important condition that must be met to encourage vocabulary learning relates to the children's interest in what they are listening to (Elley, 1989; Graves, 2009). In addition to increasing children's interest, there is a growing body of literature that asserts that bringing IK into the curriculum contributes positively to development of a coherent identity for Indigenous children (Ball, 2009; Bergstrom et al., 2003; Grande, 2004). Moreover, Rell (2005) argues that using the students' first language is a motivating factor. By using both languages, Indigenous teachers and elders can enhance both students' interest and comprehension.

Comprehension. The density and frequency of unknown words can be a source of difficulty in learning vocabulary from listening to stories. One solution for second language learners is to use the students' first language for vocabulary instruction. This is contrary to the dominant views guiding vocabulary teaching in mainstream Canadian classrooms, where

monolingual instruction assumptions dominate the education offered to linguistic minorities such as Indigenous students (Cummins, 2009; Babae, 2011). These monolingual instructional assumptions include (1) instruction should be carried out exclusively in the target language without recourse to the students' first language, (2) translation between the first language and the target language has no place in the teaching of language or literacy, and (3) the two languages should be kept separate (Cummins, 1992, 2005, 2009). Furthermore, the use of Indigenous languages in school is a right recognized internationally by Article 13 of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007). This article specifies the right of Indigenous peoples to transmit their languages, philosophies, writing systems, literature, oral traditions and histories.

Repeated retrieval. Repeated retrieval is a key element of vocabulary acquisition. In Indigenous contexts, histories are passed on from generation to generation through oral traditions and repeated retrieval. Indigenous storytelling draws on repetition of language as both a narrative and a memory device (Archibald, 2008; Francis and Reyhner, 2002). In studies of vocabulary acquisition, it has been shown that hearing the same story several times or hearing follow-up stories which reuse the same vocabulary facilitates learning new vocabulary (Nation, 2001). Although vocabulary acquisition can vary from one learner to another, some studies have found that words repeated seven times are integrated by most learners (Nation, 2001).

Decontextualization. To be learned, new vocabulary words must be repeated over time and decontextualized. Decontextualization means that the learners need to focus on the words not only as a part of the message, but as separate units of meaning in themselves (Nation, 2011). Concretely, it means that the use of storytelling to promote vocabulary acquisition will be

optimized if teachers explain the meaning of new words and emphasize pronunciation (Penno, Wilkinson & Moore, 2002).

Generative processing. Learners need to encounter new words in different contexts, such as in discussions and in picture association (Elley, 1989). In Indigenous literacies, the vocabulary generative processes are mostly oral-based. In Indigenous cultures, the kinesthetic and experiential aspect of vocabulary learning should also be included during listening and speaking activities. Kitchen, Hodson and Cherubini (2011) identify the reversible aspect of vocabulary acquisition: “They[the students] learn the words for this week then forget them immediately after the test.” A participant in that study points out the importance of experiential learning, “They’re not learning [because] they’re not living the language” (p. 621). Other IK scholars reaffirm that traditional literacy teaching was embedded in an experiential environment (Hare, 2012; Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). The experiential approaches valued in IK are also found in task-based instruction for teaching second language vocabulary (Long & Crookes, 1992). Task-based instruction focuses on the use of authentic language and on asking students to do meaningful tasks or having experiences using the target language. Additionally, experiential approaches work hand in hand with the level of processing on retention of words (Craik & Lockhart, 1972). According to these authors, the quality of mental processing increases in relation to the amount of reasoning and manipulation of a lexical unit required by a given task. Consequently, if the task requires deeper processing, it is more likely that the lexical unit will be acquired and retrieved. In addition, tasks requiring vocabulary production (e.g., talking, retelling, negotiating the meaning of a word, etc.) are more suited to acquisition of the ability to produce the new words than are activities that are only receptive (e.g., listening, watching). The memory imprint of a lexical unit

created during a productive experiential activity is thus deeper and the learner will be more likely to retrieve this lexical unit from memory and reuse it.

The learning and teaching in Indigenous contexts involve two languages and different literacies. The following research project is an example of the use of oral Indigenous literacies as a basis for teaching and learning French as a second language. Therefore, the theoretical framework of IK is in line with MP, which will be discussed next.

Multiliteracies pedagogy. Multiliteracies pedagogy encourages uncompartimentalized, localized approaches for teaching language. The concept of a pedagogy of multiliteracies was laid out in 1996 by the New London Group (Cazden et al., 1996), who redefined the notion of literacy and recommended that language teaching should be adapted to the new literacy needs raised by the digital age and the multicultural realities of increasingly globalized societies. The need to redefine the concept of literacy is inherent in the concept itself, as literacy needs evolve from generation to generation, especially given constantly developing information and communication technologies (Barré-de Miniac, 2011). For example, the literacy needs of the youth of Unamen Shipu are rooted in cultural practices and traditional linguistics, but at the same time are influenced by being part of the digital age and North American popular culture. Bhabha (2001) and Hamers & Blanc (2011) describe this situation as having a hybrid, multiple and negotiated identity, that is, an identity that is at the same time ingrained and open to the rest of the world, integrated in its community and interdependent with the rest of the world. The kindergarten classrooms of Unamen Shipu reflects this vision: there are photos of elders alongside TV characters such as Winnie the Pooh; computers are next to a tent used for the telling of legends; some students imitate the call for hunting Canadian geese, while others listen to hip-hop on their iPods. Thus, MP includes the languages and linguistic practices of the learners, even if these

languages or ways of speaking are not officially recognized. The inclusion of minority cultural practices in both languages and learning content is an integral part of MP (Kalantzis & Cope, 2004). Like the concept of IK, MP addresses issues such as the balance of power, stereotypes and power related to instructional content. In essence, this pedagogical approach aims at emancipation.

Multimodality is a pedagogical principle for multiliteracies. Multimodality refers to including various forms of oral, gestural, artistic, technological, visual and written expression in the pedagogical approach (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Mills, 2011). The purpose of this plurality of languages and communication modes is to provide a curriculum that is representative of the learner's environment (Cazden et al., 1996; Kramsch, 2008). Multiliteracies pedagogy decompartmentalizes fields of knowledge and instructional content in an interdisciplinary and holistic learning process. Multiliteracies pedagogy specifically encourages the use of intergenerational, disciplinary and environmental knowledge (Lavoie, Sarkar, Mark, Jenniss, 2012).

In MP, reading, writing and communication skills are seen as going beyond the academic setting to include an engaged, contextualized and functionalized social focus (Reuter, 2003; Street, 1993). Given that reading, writing and communicating are social practices, the issue of evaluating knowledge and skills is becoming increasingly complex (Kral, 2012; Reuter, 2003). Multiliteracies pedagogy proposes developing skills that are in line with literacy needs so that all new knowledge is transferable and long-lasting.

The significance and contribution of the current study lies in the development of a vocabulary teaching method grounded in IK and MP theory. Working together, researcher, Indigenous teachers and community elders developed a process for teaching vocabulary according to oral-based Indigenous literacy practices of the Innu language. The method includes narrative-based

storytelling, intergenerational knowledge, and experiential, relational and communicative approaches for learning French as a second language.

Methodology

This exploratory study was conducted at the *Tshishenniu Mishen* preschool in Unamen Shipu. This Innu community on the Lower North Shore of Quebec has just over 1,000 inhabitants. The village is more than 1,000 kilometres from Quebec City, and 100 kilometres from the nearest town, Natashquan. It is only accessible via small aircraft, weather permitting, or by boat between April and January, the ice-free season for the St. Lawrence River.

This study uses participatory action research (PAR). PAR was considered the best choice because it is a methodology grounded in respectful relationships based on trust and openness, which is essential for a study conducted by a non-Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous teachers. The use of PAR in Indigenous contexts is recommended to ensure that research is community-driven (Smith, 2003; Wilson, 2001 & 2003). For this study, the guidelines established in the early description of PAR by Hall (1981) were used, including the four following components:

1. The focus is on the oppressed group; in this case, on an Innu community that wants to bring IK and literacy back to the process of teaching vocabulary.
2. The research strengthens people's awareness of their own capabilities; in this case, learning from the practices used by Indigenous teachers and elders.
3. The people themselves are researchers, along with specialized outsiders; in this case, the teachers have chosen to be co-authors, to be named in all publications and to acknowledge their community.
4. The outside specialist is committed to working for change; in this case, the objective of the

study was to develop a new process for teaching vocabulary that respects the principles of MP and IK. The results demonstrate the operationalization of these concepts in a vocabulary teaching intervention.

We are aware that the full circle of PAR as described by other researchers such as Stoecker (2005) was not achieved because student performance was not evaluated. This study was a first step intended to build a good relationship based on trust and reciprocity. Thus, in this first collaboration, the teachers decided to postpone the evaluation for a second phase of the research.

The roles of the researchers. The didactic process was developed by three researchers, one is a non-native university professor and the other two are Indigenous teachers. Based on the PAR principles for Indigenous settings, the teachers, who are active members of the community, are considered co-researchers and co-authors (Jordan, 2007; Smith, 2003; Wilson, 2003). They have the skills and knowledge required to jointly decide on each phase of the research. All three researchers enhanced their understanding and strengthened their partnership by working together at each step in the process. Thus, developing this pedagogical approach has enriched the academic, cultural and experiential knowledge of the teacher-researchers from the community and the university researcher.

Participants and their roles. Thirty (30) kindergarten students and eight elders took part in developing this teaching method. In all, 12 girls and 18 boys aged 5 to 6 took part in this study. With the exception of one student with a French-speaking mother, the mother tongue of all the students was Innu. The class was taught by two teachers and was divided into two groups, one starting the day in French with Brigitte Jenniss and the other in Innu with Marie-Paul Mark. The groups switched instructional languages in the afternoon.

Data collection. Data were collected between February and March 2013. Field observations were compiled from videos recorded during meetings with the elders, the log kept

by the teacher-researchers and student portfolios. The video recordings and field notes were used to prepare the vocabulary list to be explicitly taught by the teachers, to observe the experiential knowledge, and to preserve local stories and histories. The teacher-researchers' log recorded the students' motivation and reactions, the questions they raised, their attention level and other observations during the storytelling sessions with the elders. The log also recorded the use of the targeted words during weekly teaching activities. The students' portfolios focused on their retention of the stories and the lexical units as well as their level of appreciation for the elders' stories. The portfolios also included photos representing their vocabulary learning.

Analysis process. At the end of each week for eight weeks, the collected data were analyzed using triangulation of the different methods (videos, log, and portfolio). The analysis meetings were conducted by videoconference with the three researchers and lasted two hours. The analysis examined the effectiveness of the teaching method based on the teachers' experience for that week and the students' appropriation of the process. The teaching method was optimized each week in response to the data collected during the previous week from the teachers' log, videos, and the students' portfolios.

Results

This study, conducted with two groups of kindergarten students in the Unamen Shipu community, resulted in the development of a didactic process for vocabulary instruction that integrates IK and MP concepts. As members of the community, the teachers shared a sense of urgency regarding the importance of passing on the culture, particularly given the limited number of elders still alive who had lived the traditional lifestyle. The teachers talked with the children to find out their interests and come up with instructional themes. The eight themes were: my origins, traditional clothing, past trades, ice fishing, the legend of the drum, traditional food, musical

instruments and folkloric dances. Next, the teachers talked with elders to choose fifteen words related to each theme. The words were selected based on the students' natural environment and the frequency of word use within the community, not on the standardized frequency scales for French. For example, the lexical unit "caribou meat" was used instead of "boeuf" (beef in French), as cattle do not live in this region of Quebec and the children of Unamen Shipu regularly eat caribou. The selected words also respected the standards for Quebec French. Moreover, the original names of Innu villages were used instead of the official names used by the Quebec government. For example, the community of Unamen Shipu was renamed La Romaine when the government confined the Innu to this reserve. During the meeting with elders on the theme of origins, Mr. Uniam Mark explained the importance of retaining the Innu names, as this descriptive language aids in understanding the names of villages and geographical features. For example, the name Unamen Shipu means "painted or red-ochre river," referring to the deposits of that mineral found on the banks of the Olomane River.

This didactic process was entitled "*L'envolée de la parole, des chants et des légendes, en passant par les pas de danse au son du tambour- Pietakanit aimun, nikamun mak atanukan eku niaminanit e petakanit teueikan*" (The flight of words, songs and legends through dancing to the drumbeat). The process involves two phases. First, the parents and elders contextualize the words by recounting their life stories. Next, the teachers use these words in class during various pedagogical activities.

Community-based learning. Once a week, two or three elders told a story based on a particular theme. For example, for the traditional clothing theme, Charlotte Peshpine and Adéline Mark visited the class wearing traditional dress to speak about how clothing was made when the Innu

lived in the forest. They specified the materials used to make clothing, such as the use of flour sacks. They spoke about men wearing two types of clothing, one for activities within the tent and one for hunting. These two types of clothing also helped women choose their future husbands, as a man with both types of clothing demonstrated his skills in both types of activities.

The storytelling sessions were held in the most appropriate learning setting for development of literacy skills. Some sessions, such as that for the ice fishing theme, were held outdoors. Others were held in the classroom. As is customary for the Innu, these sessions began with a prayer in Innu, recited by the students. Next, each student introduced themselves to the elders by giving their traditional name and their ancestry. Next, the elders told their life stories, focusing on the theme for that week. Children listened to the words in the elders' stories. The narrative-based stories were accompanied by tales, legends, demonstrations, songs, and so on. The stories were told in Innu, because it is the mother tongue of the elders and all the children, with the exception of one who is Francophone, but who understood Innu well. During the approximately thirty minutes of the story presentation, the students were very attentive: "They listened, they were very quiet. It was like at mass"⁵ (Brigitte Jenniss, teacher). To the great surprise of the teachers, the students' concentration and interest in the story sessions was maintained for the entire eight weeks of the project. After the life story, a snack was shared. During this time, the students could talk with the elders and have their pictures taken with them, while enjoying a traditional treats like cloudberry pie and bannock.

During the second part of the meeting, the elders gave a demonstration. At this time, the children tried out the new words experientially. For example, they imitated the movements for making snowshoes, they observed a canoe being built, they tried on traditional clothing, they carried the

⁵ All the quotes of the teachers are a translation from French to English.

canoe, they repeated the song, or they danced the *Makushan*⁶. While trying out each activity, the students asked the elders questions in Innu: “How do you sew without machines?”⁷ (Mitesh, 5 years old). According to the teachers, the meetings with the elders optimized acquisition of new words in Innu and French: “Yes, they learn more, because they experience [the words] with the elders. They are not just words. [The students] ‘touch’ them, experience them and feel them” (Marie-Paul Mark, teacher).

This learning process truly piqued the interest of the community: “The elders were happy and proud to come. They were touched and surprised to hear the students recite a prayer in Innu in school” (Marie-Paul Mark, teacher). For example, for the ice fishing theme, the parents had helped their children make fishing poles by finding all the necessary material and assembling the fishing-pole at home. The children and their families were at the heart of this preparation. One student phoned the teacher to say, “My mother can’t come because she works, but my grandmother can take some time to come fishing”⁷ (Caroline, 5 years old). These activities also generated considerable parental participation: “We had a lot of parents, lots of dads” (Brigitte Jenniss, teacher).

Complementing the elders participation, a homework-discussion sheet containing 15 words in both French and Innu, accompanied by images, was sent home with the students. The purpose of this sheet was to encourage discussion between parents and children. This visual support was used as a reminder of the words included in elders’ stories for the student and as a communication tool to show the weekly learning goals. The parents were invited to tell a story incorporating the words and related to that week’s theme. For example, on the week of the ice-fishing theme, a sheet showing a fishing-pole and the associated words was sent home. Some

⁶ A traditional round dance performed by women.

⁷ This quote is a translation from Innu to English.

parents told stories of fishing trips they had experienced. During sharing time in class, we found that many parents requested the stories of the elders be retold by their children because they wanted to learn from the elders' life stories. In the end, the parents were invited into the class to listen to the elders' stories. Parents also helped prepare the literacy events. Parents took part in the community snack when they came to pick up their child. Many parents participated to this community-based learning activity. Neighbours asked the teachers what they were doing at the school: "Yeah, there were a lot of snowmobiles in front of the school on Friday morning"⁷ (personal communication, neighbour, February 22, 2013).

Classroom-based learning. The week following the storytelling session, the teachers used various methods to teach the words introduced by the parents and elders. The class of 30 students was divided into two groups, with each group engaging in the activities in one language in the morning and in the other language in the afternoon.

For the first activity, the 15 terms for that week were presented with their matching images on a transparency. The teacher explained each word, referring to the matching words and images, and pronouncing each word, then having the students repeat it. The teachers felt that the students were learning more with the images: "Yes, they are learning more through this process, because they are more visual, so I use the words with the image" (Marie-Paul Mark, teacher). During each daily sharing time, the group would start by carefully pronouncing the 15 words for that week. Next, the students would talk about the use of each word made by the elders or some students shared stories told by their parents. Over the course of the week, the teachers observed that the students were motivated and interested in using the words learned with the elders. During the sharing time, the teachers would also repeat key questions asked by the elders such as "Who are your grandparents?"⁷ (Uniam Mark, elder). This is a very sensitive question, as many

children were adopted by grandparents, so they thought their grandparents were their parents. For example, during the first meeting, three-quarters of the students did not know the names of their grandparents. The teachers discussed the issue of adoption, as it is quite common in Innu villages due to social problems.

During the workshops and free games periods in the afternoon, children could play in the *Innu Aitun* corner, designed as part of this didactic approach. This space was set up so that students could use words in context while playing with objects (clothing, snowshoes, drums, etc.) brought in by the elders. In this corner, the children could use their new words in context while imitating the elders' skills. While some children played, others drew what they had learned from the elders and could try writing a letter or a word as a pre-writing activity.

Lastly, once a week, the teacher organized a directed activity with the entire group. This activity consisted of creating a story together using all the words of the week. The matched "word-images" were placed in the centre of the group and students included them in their story. The teacher started the narrative, and asked questions as the story went along to encourage the children to continue telling the story, questioning all of the students so that all the words of the week were used in the story. She asked the children to visualize the story:

- "I went into the forest. I brought... What did I bring... my **snowshoes**⁸?" (Brigitte Jenniss, teacher)
- "Then, my grandfather was going to go canoeing" (Martin, 5 years old)
- "Yes, with my grandfather. There was even a **wolf**. HOWL! (Kevin, 5 years old)
- "Were you scared?" (Brigitte Jenniss, teacher)
- "No, I wasn't scared in my **canoe**. I was with my grandfather" (Kevin, 5 years old).⁹

⁸ The words in bold indicate the word-images picked by the student. These words were part of the weekly vocabulary list.

Overall, the process brought the parents, elders and teachers together. It used various receptive methods for teaching vocabulary, such as life stories, demonstrations and drawings. Other teaching methods called on the students to produce the vocabulary words, such as the *Innu Aitun* corner, the class meetings and the collective story. The watershed moment in this process was the village festival on Mother's Day, during which the children used their new knowledge and skills.

Discussion

This section is a discussion of how this Participatory Action Research developed an alternative method for teaching vocabulary using multiliteracies pedagogy principles and Indigenous knowledge. By listening to members of their community (children, parents and elders) and by being rooted in their territory and engaged in their community, the teacher-researchers intuitively applied IK. This teaching approach creates a learning community that goes beyond the children and teachers to include the researchers, parents and elders. This vocabulary teaching approach originates with the life stories of the elders. In the IK literature, the elders of a community are considered the guardians of knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Bell, 2004; Ortiz, 2009). Before colonization, they filled the role of teacher for their people (Roy, 2007). Since education is a collective activity in Indigenous communities, it was very natural to invite the elders to be part of the vocabulary teaching process we developed. This exploratory study leads to similar conclusions. The interest of the children, parents and elders in learning and teaching vocabulary using this approach was surprising. The students' motivation and confidence for learning the words in their second language exceeded the teachers' expectations. This increased interest and motivation can be linked to the use of indigenous literacy practices, content and languages (Graves, 2009; Armstrong, 2013; Rell, 2005). During every sharing time, the teachers used a

⁹ This quote is a translation from French to English.

form of talk story (Foy, 2009) to communicate student life experiences related to the knowledge the elders had shared. By telling each other their experiences, retelling the elders' stories to their parents and repeating some parts of the elders' demonstrations, the students were repeatedly retrieving the lexical units with communicative activities.

This holistic approach to teaching vocabulary decolonizes the curriculum by using the knowledge resources of the local community instead of materials and curricula provided by the government or by publishers. Quebec school textbooks generally recommend teaching vocabulary based on written stories with a related word list. Using this standard approach, the students and teachers of Unamen Shipu had become demotivated over time, as the stories were not representative of their reality or environment. For example, the textbooks generally talk about seasonal activities like apple-picking in the fall or collecting maple syrup in the early spring, but for the youth of Unamen Shipu, there are no apple orchards or maple groves. For them, spring is the season for hunting Canadian geese and trapping lobster. The choice of themes and the corresponding word lists for this program emerged from the community's concerns regarding environmental and cultural preservation. For example, the teachers chose the traditional dress theme, since one of their mothers was the last to wear traditional clothing and she had died the previous year. Members of the community were very enthusiastic about the idea of incorporating words related to traditional dress into the curriculum. Including subcultural references in learning content is a central principle of MP (Kalantzis & Cope, 2004). The word lists developed in this pedagogical process encouraged the use of words from the local setting and culture, rather than relying on standardized language frequency scales. Certain Indigenous place names and family names were used instead of the official names given by the government. Thomas & Paynter (2010) assert that

the adoption of the original names and spellings is a way of re-appropriating territory in a process of decolonization.

For the teachers, it was important to return to the oral transmission of their cultural heritage by integrating the life stories of the elders and parents, and their community's tales and legends. This method integrates the notion of sustainable teaching and other principles of MP such as multilingualism and multimodality (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Mills, 2011). In addition, IK recognizes spoken-word traditions as part of the foundation of literacy (Archibald, 2008; McMullen & Rohrbach, 2003). Recognition given to IK in schools helps reassert the value of Indigenous cultural identity (Ball, 2004).

In the case presented here, the value given to vocabulary acquisition went beyond the students' ability to understand and produce words: it included the social and cultural aspects, such as bringing the community together and transmitting traditional culture.

Conclusion

In all, the process developed in this study demonstrates the operationalization of MP in a specific Indigenous context. Teaching the official language, French, in a post-colonial subcultural context like that of the Indigenous peoples in Quebec, is a complex undertaking that requires contextual and flexible approaches such as those offered by MP. The results of this study contribute to our understanding of the interdependence of preserving cultural heritage and teaching vocabulary in Indigenous settings. This exploratory study allowed a process for teaching vocabulary to be developed with teachers from the area, in collaboration with the elders, parents and children of the Innu community of Unamen Shipu. In spite of the enthusiasm of the various stakeholders for the pedagogical process and the observed outcomes, a formal assessment of the students' vocabulary acquisition is recommended to evaluate vocabulary acquisition. This formal

assessment could be done in partnership with other researchers from the community and the university. More importantly, follow-up of students' involved in this teaching approach throughout the rest of their schooling is also highly recommended.

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