What is this research about?
This research explored the experiences of six Aboriginal teachers in both mainstream and native teacher education programs in Ontario. These early-career teachers from the Mohawk, Anishinabe and Métis groups reflected upon the challenges they encountered during their teacher preparation courses and first years of teaching. Specifically, this research identified the need to design current teacher education programs that value the individual and cultural identities of Aboriginal teacher candidates.

What did the researchers do?
The researchers invited ten Aboriginal teachers within their first five years of teaching from across Ontario to participate in a three-day Wildfire Gathering (Hodson, 2004) session. Wildfire Gathering refers to a series of talking circles where participants are invited to share their experiences. This is a process that respects Aboriginal peoples’ cultural beliefs. The final sample was reduced to six Aboriginal teachers, as distance and weather prevented the participation of four teachers.

What you need to know:
This research study included interviews with a small number of Aboriginal teachers to better understand the challenges they faced while becoming a teacher and while employed as a teacher. Aboriginal teachers who participated in this study reported a lack of support for Aboriginal educators in pre-service teaching programs, while applying to mainstream teaching jobs, and while employed as teachers within schools. However, the experiences they shared points to several concrete ways that Aboriginal educators can be better supported throughout their training and professional work within schools.

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experiences of:
- choosing teaching as a career path;
- attending a teacher education program;
- making use of supports available to new teachers;
- challenges specific to Aboriginal teachers.

The researchers analyzed the participants’ responses and identified key similarities and differences between the teachers’ experiences.

What did the researchers find?
The researchers found that participants believed they had experienced institutional discrimination either through their pre-service teacher training, employment, or both. One participant, reported being referred to as “Tomahawk Man” while employed with a school board (p. 117), while another reported that “only the custodian greeted her [at her school] in the morning” (p. 117). Another participant felt that Aboriginal teachers were more likely to be considered for Aboriginal language teaching positions but not for teaching other academic subjects.

In their reports about their teacher training program, Aboriginal teacher participants expressed concern about feeling that they had to conform to a colonialist style of learning and knowing or risk being ‘weeded out’ of pre-service programs.

The researchers also found shortcomings in both mainstream and Native teacher education programs (NTEP). For example, participants in NTEP felt their program made false assumptions about the teaching of Aboriginal students. These programs stressed mainstream knowledge and skills while treating language and culture as secondary.

How can you use this research?
Administrators and teachers may wish to use this research (in consultation with the wider body of research on new teachers and Aboriginal educators) as a starting point for discussions about how best to support Aboriginal teachers within their schools.

Administrators may wish to consider initiatives that reach-out to Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal students, and...
Aboriginal community members to invite feedback on whether or not the current school environment provides adequate support for Aboriginal students and educators.

Teachers may want to use this article as a starting point for considering the wider body of research on Aboriginal ways of teaching and learning and using instructional methods that may differ from traditional methods but which may better support Aboriginal learners and continuing to foster learning amongst all students.

Administrators and teachers can also consider ways of including non-stereotypical Aboriginal content and perspectives into daily curriculum.

About the researchers
At the time this research article was published:

Julian Kitchen and Lorenzo Cherubini were Associate Professors in the Faculty of Education Department at Brock University.

Lyn Trudeau, a member of the Ojibway, Eagle Clan, was a Masters student and graphic artist/designer at the Tecumseh Centre for Aboriginal Research and Education;

Janie Hodson was the Administrative Coordinator in the Tecumseh Centre for Aboriginal Research and Education. She has worked in healing and wellness in the Aboriginal community for over 15 years.

Original Article:

Other References:
Keywords:
Aboriginal teachers, new teachers, native teacher education programs (NTEP), institutional discrimination, talking circles, elementary education, secondary education, pre-service teaching programs, Equity

About this summary
The Ontario Education Research Exchange (OERE) is a project of the Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research, an Ontario network promoting the use of research in education. The OERE’s clear language summaries of academic research aim to support this mandate.

This summary has been adapted from the ResearchSnapshot series developed by York University and ResearchImpact and has been developed according to writing and design principles unique to OERE. For more information about this summary or the OERE network please contact oere.knaer.oise@utoronto.ca.

This summary reflects findings from this study only and is not necessarily representative of the broader body of literature on this subject. Please consult the original document for complete details about this research. In case of any disagreement, the original document should be understood as authoritative.