How to Get There: Conceptualizing Effective Teaching

Our conceptual framework or model for effective teaching summarizes actions that engage Indigenous students in learning. The model compiles the actions of individual teachers into a representational configuration of effective teaching practice. It was developed based on interviews, observations, and stories shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. The model reflects the relational nature of teaching and the interactive philosophy of the Nehinuw. Teachers emphasized that relationships were the key to effective teaching—that is, relationships between the teacher and students, among the students and class, with the learning environment (the how, or the process, of learning), and to the construction of knowledge (the what, or content) in the classroom. This chapter provides an overview of the model. Subsequent chapters provide the details of teacher actions in each of the four categories, with illustrative case studies for each category.

Developing the Model

LINDA: As a Euro-Canadian living with Indigenous peoples and working in Indigenous education, I have tried to understand Indigenous ways of being so I can incorporate that philosophy into my life and teaching. My understanding of Indigenous philosophy has grown as I’ve worked with many Elders and interacted with various Indigenous peoples over the years. For example, as mentioned earlier, the late Elder Ken Goodwill from the Dakota First Nation
of Standing Buffalo saw human (and spiritual) development as learning about your place in this world – finding out who you are, including who you are in relation to the world, discovering the gifts you have, developing those gifts to make your contribution in this world, and assuming the responsibility for the use of those gifts. This view of life speaks to the purpose of learning for all children. If a young person grows up not knowing who they are, how will they know what knowledge to seek, what talents to develop, and the responsibilities of those talents? How will they come to understand that their talents and strengths carry with them an obligation to use them to make a positive contribution to the society in which they live? Is this not what education should be about?

The principles of effective teaching for Indigenous students apply to all students, but Indigenous education has unique features based on the history, culture, and philosophies of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, who tend to view the world in a more holistic way than the European framework that is the basis of our education system in Canada. As mentioned earlier, effective teaching for Indigenous students is about relationships and connections – that is, relationships between the teacher and student, among students in the class, and connections to the content and process of learning. In talking about spirituality and human development, Ken Goodwill was describing the essence of good teaching. If we as teachers, in our classroom actions and interactions, can open ourselves and make positive connections with and for our students, we create a place where we all, students and teachers, learn about ourselves. We learn how to be in the world, how to interact with others and through reflection, come to have the knowledge of who we are as a person and as a people.

The model presented in this chapter was developed based on interviews and in-school observations, using grounded theory methods first articulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967) that have since been expanded upon (Corbin and Strauss 2008; Glaser 1978, 1992, 1998; Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1994). Interviews were conducted with effective teachers of Indigenous students (as identified by the researcher through observation, by their communities, or by administrators) from a variety of teaching contexts in mid-Canada. Face-to-face interviews ranged from one to two hours in length and were transcribed and returned to teachers for verification. Some of the teachers participated in more than one interview. Although fifteen teachers were initially interviewed, due to saturation of the categories, the model and quotes are based on the data from eleven teachers. Seven were Indigenous teachers who self-identified as
Cree, Dene, Métis, and Saulteaux, while four were Euro-Canadian. Although the initial focus was on elementary teaching, four teachers had high school experience. In addition to the interviews, observations were conducted in three elementary classrooms at one First Nations school over a period of three months to compare interview data to teachers’ actual behaviour. Field data included the researcher’s descriptive notes, photographs, and audio- and videotaped activities.

Data was analyzed using the “constant comparative method” (Glaser and Strauss 1967) in which data analysis accompanies data collection. As data was collected, it was coded for similarities and differences. Categories were developed as patterns became evident and connections among the different categories were made (Glaser 1992). The model emerged from the process of conceptualization using several grounded theory techniques such as memoing (taking reflective notes of what appears to be important features in the data) and different forms of coding (see Goulet 2005) as well as comparison to other field-based research on effective teachers of Indigenous students. Initial analysis of the categories was presented for feedback to the school board and all the teachers in the school where the observation took place. After the model was developed, stories or the case studies were gathered from additional teachers whose experiences clearly illustrated the categories of the model.

Observing a great teacher at work is like watching a beautifully choreographed dancer or athlete perform. It looks easy until you try it yourself. Teaching is further complicated because what works in one context with one group of students may not work in another context. Also, it may be impossible for me to achieve the same results as a teacher whose gifts differ from mine. This chapter examines the different aspects of effective teaching to identify the beliefs and actions of effective teachers of Indigenous students and how those beliefs and actions interact with each other to create positive learning environments for Indigenous students.

Contextualizing the Model

The model of effective teaching flows as it does because of the context of Indigenous education. There are general and particular aspects to the context that influence the actions of the teachers. The general aspects are the socio-historical context of colonization and the ethnocultural context of Indigenous cultures. The particular aspects include the local community, school, classroom, and student conditions.
In Canadian schools, when Indigenous students enter a classroom, they face the possibility of discrimination from the teacher, their fellow students, or the curriculum (RCAP 1996; Schissel and Wotherspoon 2003; St. Denis and Hampton 2002). Their attitudes are shaped by their own past schooling experiences, as well as those of their parents and siblings. Many are justifiably wary and do not trust that the learning process will benefit them. The denigration of Indigenous peoples in Canadian society (St. Denis and Hampton 2002) can be internalized by Indigenous students and reproduced in their behaviour in the classroom, which can cause some students to lose belief in themselves and their own abilities (Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern 1990; Mussell 2008). Lack of self-esteem and confidence can affect how students approach learning. Learning is a risk-taking endeavour because in order to learn, one has to function on the “edge of one’s competence or on the border of incompetence” (Rogoff 1990, 202). In the Canadian experience, rather than “nurturing the individual, the schooling experience typically erodes identity and self-worth [of Indigenous students] who regularly encounter racism, racism expressed not only in interpersonal exchanges but also through the denial of Indigenous values, perspectives and cultures in the curriculum and the life of the institution” (RCAP 1996, 434).

Racism plays itself out in schools in myriad ways, but primarily, “oppression is a situation or dynamic in which certain ways of being (e.g., having certain identities) are privileged … while others are marginalized” (Kumashiro 2000, 25). Given this situation, the teacher needs to demonstrate to Indigenous students that she cares about and respects them, their culture, and ways of being, that she doesn’t blame them for their colonized situation, and that the students and their culture will not be marginalized by her or other students in the life of the classroom and curriculum. In the model of effective teaching, teachers address issues of colonization while reinforcing Indigenous beliefs, values, and practices to create culturally meaningful learning environments for Indigenous students.

Teacher Characteristics

The teachers whom we interviewed and observed had diverse personal, social, and cultural characteristics. Despite this diversity, there were common features in their beliefs about teaching Indigenous students. These teachers recognized the uniqueness of Indigenous students in terms of culture and colonization. They were committed to teaching. They believed in themselves and stood up for their students and their beliefs.
These teachers believed Indigenous children had unique needs that required adaptation in instruction. Most were aware of the historical aspect of colonization, either through involvement in an Indigenous-teacher training program or through self-education. Some of the non-Indigenous teachers had taken Indian Studies courses because they felt they did not know enough about the Indigenous perspective of history. Indigenous teachers sought, through oral history or archival records and journals, to learn more about community history so they would be more knowledgeable in their teaching.

All the teachers expressed a strong commitment to the profession of teaching, to the children they were teaching, and to the communities in which they worked. Many put in long hours of preparation, finding activities and materials to which students would respond. They recognized the importance of taking responsibility for student attendance and student learning. Genuine appreciation of students was evident, as many teachers expressed the love they had for their students. All the teachers were involved in community events and/or extracurricular activities for their students.

These teachers trusted their ability to do their best for students. Val talked about “having high expectations of yourself and just going — taking the kids above and beyond.” Sometimes they faced situations in which they had to trust their own instincts, especially when working through emotional or social issues with their students or in dealing with parents. Often, changes they made were not easily accepted by others in the school or community, so inner strength was needed to stand firm when their instructional adaptation engendered student learning. All the teachers talked about passion — finding your passion, gift, or strength as a teacher, so you could “make the curriculum come
alive” (Fran) or engender that sense of mature pride and responsibility in the lives of their students.

Effective teachers were aware that the cultures of their Indigenous students were unique. They recognized that students who live in communities where English is spoken as an additional language or dialect may have limited experience with school English. These teachers compensated for the effects of poverty of Indigenous communities and the racialization of Indigenous students. Although not stated explicitly by all the teachers, they recognized their students’ lived experience of racism. Yvonne, a Cree Métis teacher, talked about this reality of racism in her life:

[When I was at university] we were asked by one of our professors how many of us, as Métis people, had been made to feel embarrassed about or to deny our Indian ancestry. Practically everyone in the class raised their hands. The stories spilled out ... as we began the process of healing, reclaiming and celebrating our identities, especially our Indianness. We recognized our common experience was not a mistake. Rather it was a direct consequence of our lived experience with racism in and out of the classroom.

As Yvonne indicates, Indigenous peoples share common racializing experiences. In Cree, racism can be expressed in a variety of ways. E muchenimeet means one is looked upon negatively, as incapable of a good or excellent performance. E peewehenimeet is another demeaning word; it literally means that one is looked upon as tiny, minuscule fragmented pieces, with the underlying thought of irrelevancy and not worthy of attention. There is also e tupatenimeet, meaning one is looked upon as being low to the ground. The flip side of the latter statement is captured by e ispahugeniminisot, which means that one is exhibiting the aura of elitist superiority.

Teachers also talked about the unique characteristics of the different communities, school systems, and schools. Each had different resources available to them. The varying styles of administration at both the system and the school levels influenced the teachers’ actions. Doris reported that the principal made a difference in her willingness to take risks in her teaching. If the principal was supportive, she could push herself and really follow the lead of the children and herself. If the principal was not supportive of innovation, a teacher needed to be more cautious. Val said she experienced pressure from past principals to cover aspects of the curriculum in a certain way.

The teachers also taught differently from year to year depending on the grade level they were teaching, the group of students they had, and the
characteristics of their students. The process of engaging students in learning also differed from one teacher to another depending on her or his individual strengths as a teacher. Teachers reported that what works for one teacher or one group of students will not necessarily work for another. For example, teachers used the talking or sharing circle in various ways. Val found the talking circle extremely effective for young children, but it did not work well with her middle-year students. On the other hand, when Yvonne, a middle-years teacher, had students evaluate her teaching at the end of the year, they told her the talking circle was the most effective strategy she used. Teachers who had been teaching for many years also stated that their strategies and materials had changed over the years.

The passion of these teachers carried over into their actions within the school as an institution. Many of the teachers described situations when they took a stand against racist policies or practices. These policies and practices included being asked by the superintendent not to socialize with community members, being told not to use the first language of the children in teaching, hearing racist comments from other staff members, encountering resistance to adaptation for Indigenous students, and imposing unfair discipline upon Indigenous students. Some of these policies have changed, and effective teachers are partially responsible for those positive changes in policy. Doris described how, when first teaching, she put her career on the line for a disciplinary policy she thought was unfair.

I had a student in [G]rade 1 who didn't speak a word of English; [she spoke only Cree] ... She was so shy, she hid under her desk for the first two weeks of school. I almost gave up my teaching career for her because the rule was "You do not stand on the swings." One day a teacher brought her in to the principal to be strapped because she was standing on the swings. I threw a fit and said, "If you strap her when she does not even understand what you are talking about and all your rules, then I don't belong here or in this profession." I started for the door, and I would have quit. I felt that strongly. My principal came after me and said, "We won't strap her. We won't strap her. But you can't be such an old mother hen." But I'm still a mother hen.

This incident illustrates the unique needs of Indigenous children in the school system. It also demonstrates how the commitment, passion, and compassion of teachers, as well as their refusal to comply with unjust policies, can lead to student retention in school.
Characteristics of Indigenous Students

Although the teachers in this study did not use the term colonization, they all described situations that were the result of colonization and racism. Teachers noted how they taught for children who live in poverty. Sometimes the students came to school without adequate food. Teachers also saw poverty as restricting a child's access to certain opportunities related to school learning, such as literacy experiences with books or magazines.

In Indigenous communities, colonization imposed a system of external governance and decision making. There was and continues to be resistance to the imposition of external decision making. Standing up for oneself, or neepuhkistumawin, is an important part of self-development for Crees, as it challenging excessive authoritarianism and colonialism. Teachers said that Indigenous children did not respond well to autocratic authority or imposed decision making. Fran explained the connection between the community's experience with colonial authority and the authority vested in the role of the teacher when she said, "[In the Indigenous community,] there has been a stigma attached to authority in general and teachers are seen as an authority figure."

As aforementioned, in addition to the economic and political aspects of colonization, Indigenous children are also affected by the ideology of racism that stereotypes Indigenous peoples and denigrates their cultures and achievements. Fran described the insidious nature of racism in the lives of the children she taught:

In the mainstream school system, as much as it is changing, there's still an awful lot of Eurocentrism. It's very ingrained in the texts and the audio-visual things students see. The First Nations children have that view of themselves because that's what they have been exposed to ... Other things are really subtle - just sort of infused into life generally, that the students feel put down, they feel inferior, they feel less than ... Some of that is related to the poverty - the prohibitive costs for many [Indigenous] families, like figure skating, hockey, and music lessons - all kinds of things young people would like to do, and they are not always able to do because of the cost. It's so subtle they don't even know they feel that way quite often but it's displayed in various things they do and say.

The teachers in this study believed stereotyping had a negative effect on their students' relationship to school. They referred to many students who had
a real fear of “looking dumb” (Owen). Often, students were reluctant to show they did not know something or would not ask a question for fear of appearing stupid to others. Val, an Indigenous teacher, commented that stereotyping in schooling and historical colonial practices made children feel ashamed of being an Indigenous person: “The [schools] really turned [Indigenous students] off their own people, their own language and their own culture, and just kind of wiped it right off. I know a lot of schools are still doing that.”

Colonization and racism have produced high levels of social and personal problems in Indigenous communities, such as alcohol and drug abuse, violence, suicide, and medical problems. Teachers in this study were well aware of the high levels of stress in the personal lives of their students – stress that contributed to either withdrawal or acting out behaviours in the classroom. The teachers recognized that Indigenous parents were struggling to do the best they could in challenging circumstances without much support. Several teachers labelled the impact of residential schools as problematic. Most teaching in residential schools was based on the authoritarian teacher-directed practices of kiskinaumagehin and very little on the other Cree forms of teaching and learning, such as kiskinaumatowin (interactive teaching each other) and kiskinaumasowin (self-teaching). Summer visits back to the communities were not enough to balance this rigid structure. The loss of parenting skills by parents who grew up in residential schools meant some children did not have a positive authority figure in their lives. Kendra referred to one aspect of the intergenerational effects of the residential schools: she believed that because residential schools did not engender positive self-esteem in students, as parents, these individuals could not “give something to their kids they didn’t have.” Parental involvement in the school was hampered by the parents’ negative schooling experiences.

While teachers acknowledged the problems faced by their students, they also recognized the positive strengths children derived from their Indigenous culture, such as speaking an Indigenous language, having a sense of humour, and resiliency when faced with obstacles. Many had strong bonds of kinship and maintained close supportive relationships with others in the community. Those who spoke their Indigenous language had the Indigenous knowledge that was embedded in the language. Most had heard many oral stories told by relatives or family friends, since achimostatowin (exchanging and telling each other stories) is a favourite pastime of the Cree and other Indigenous groups. These children knew how to focus and listen attentively. Those who participated in traditional activities on the land had a vast knowledge of the natural sciences. Attendance at ceremonies and other cultural events taught students
traditional values and cultural pride. Often, Indigenous children were seen as more independent and able to take on responsibilities without adult supervision at a young age. Many children had the resiliency to overcome problems, equipped with positive survival skills Indigenous people have used to help themselves deal with the stresses of colonization and racism, such as teasing, humour, and kiyam – letting it go.\(^1\)

While generalizations about the characteristics of Indigenous children were made in this study, it was evident that communities, families, and children are not all affected in the same way by colonization and racism – the effects are uneven. Some communities, especially in the North, have gone through a period of rapid social and cultural change, with an accompanying loss of both language and involvement in traditional activities connected to the land. Some Indigenous communities have embraced cultural revitalization and take pride in their Indigenous heritage and cultural practices. Some are moving forward in the development of self-determination and the local administration of services, decision making, and accountability, while other communities are facing a greater struggle to break the colonial structures of governance. Some families have been able to overcome intergenerational poverty. Some are able to provide access to a wide variety of cultural as well as mainstream experiences. Some have strength of spirit from their involvement in traditional cultural or spiritual practices. There is diversity in Indigenous communities, families, and children. At the same time, the history of colonization and racism has and continues to influence how Indigenous people and their children relate to schooling. A compassionate and respectful approach is a prerequisite to teaching students who have direct experience with the demoralizing and destructive effects of racism and colonization.

The Model of Effective Teaching

The model of effective teaching is a representational configuration of Indigenous education, created to clarify the interrelationships and capture the interactive, cyclical nature of the process of engaging Indigenous children in learning. The complex interrelated processes that occurred in the classrooms of our study are condensed and highlighted to capture the main actions and resulting consequences of those actions. To describe the interrelationships, we use one teacher to represent the actions of all the teachers – that is, the teacher referred to in the singular represents a composite view of all the teachers.

In the model of effective teaching, the four main relational categories of teacher actions – relationship with the student, relationships among students,
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connection to process, and connection to content – are each represented as one quadrant of an interactive whole. Although the model is based on interviews with and observations of teachers, it reflects the key Nehiñúw concepts of social relationships and interactivity. The four main categories are made up of different subcategories. Subsequent chapters describe the specific teachers’ actions that make up the different subcategories of each main category. Each category influences the other and, in practice, many of the actions in one category are related to subcategories in another category.

The teacher’s actions in each of the four categories produce consequences that connect the student to different aspects of learning. The first and foundational category connects the teacher to the student so that the student becomes more willing to follow the lead of the teacher in the classroom (kiskinaunāgēhin: teacher-directed learning); the second connects the students to each other so that the peer pressure of the class supports the learning goals (similar to kiskinaumatowin: teaching each other); the third connects students to the
process of learning so that they take responsibility for their learning (similar to *kiskinaumasowin*: self-teaching); and the fourth connects the students to the content of the learning so that learning has relevance and meaning, or *nisi-tootumowin* (understanding).

The model represents the process of teacher actions that engage Indigenous students, beginning at the bottom right hand of the circle and progressing in a clockwise manner. The spiral begins with the student coming to the learning environment with a teacher who views him as an individual and as a sociocultural, ethnocultural being, and continues around the circle. The development of an effective learning environment for students is represented in the model in a circular format because teaching is interactive and holistic. Actions (*itootumohina*, literally “doings”; *iseechigehina* are actions with impact) in the classroom never follow a smooth trajectory. In reality, the movement of students and teachers can occur in several areas at the same time, with each development impacting other areas of the circle. Because the consequences of teachers’ actions in the model are generalized, in reality the consequences identified may not occur for every instance of the action. The local context and circumstances, including the characteristics and responses of students, influence when and how quickly the teacher can undertake certain actions identified in the different categories.

Categories, subcategories, and actions in this model are interdependent and interrelated. Each category is made up of its sub-categories, which in turn consist of specific teacher actions. The specific teacher actions are too numerous to be represented graphically in the model, so the remainder of this chapter provides an overview of the teacher categories and subcategories, while the following chapters provide the details regarding the teacher actions in each of the categories and subcategories. (See Appendix 2 for a descriptive summary of the categories, subcategories, and attributes that make up the model.)

The first step, or Category 1, of the engagement and learning process is the development of a relationship between the teacher and the student who belongs to an Indigenous culture that is or has been negatively affected by racism and colonization. The relationship is thus one that creates a decolonized, culturally affirming interpersonal connection between the teacher and the student.

The first subcategory, “Belief in student,” doesn’t sound like an action, but it became an action when it was conveyed to students, when teachers demonstrated their belief in the student as a capable person – capable of learning and of changing behaviour. In Cree, belief and truth come from the same frontal
stem, tap-, and are therefore closely related in Nehinuw thought. Tapehin is truth and tapuhaugenectumowin is belief. Flowing from that is tapuhaugenimitowin, which means believing in one another.

In the second subcategory, the teacher develops a close, personal relationship with the student by showing she genuinely cares for him, which is similar to the Nehinuw concepts of weechi (help or support) and of otootemitowin (openness to others). Genuine caring for the student reassures him that the teacher wants the best for him and that she will not do anything to purposely hurt him. Taking this initial stance with children assures them they will not be rejected for who they are, as is the case in colonial relationships of discrimination. Showing humanness means the teacher interacts with students in an informal manner, which signals that she is approachable—that is, the authority inherent in the role of the teacher will not be used in a rigid, dictatorial manner. Informality also allows the teacher to be honest with students and to share her life experiences, both funny and sad. Laughter and the closeness that is possible when people share their emotions build the relationship.

With this closeness and her actions, the teacher demonstrates that she is respectful of the student and of Indigenous peoples, reflecting the strong Nehinuw value of kistenimitowin (respect). She expresses interest in the life of the child, his family, likes, dislikes, interests, and life outside of school. The child tentatively shares some of his life with the teacher. In response, the teacher demonstrates value for the cultural life of the child, affirming the Indigenous culture and respecting the social circumstances of the child. When the teacher responds respectfully, the child becomes more willing to be open with the teacher.

Trust is engendered as the power of the teacher is used in a just manner, and teacher actions demonstrate that she expects students to act responsibly. Mumiseewin is trustworthy behaviour. Mumiseetotatowin is the trustworthy belief in one another and connotes reliance on each other. Boundaries for behaviour are clarified so students are aware of what is expected of them when they interact with the teacher. Firm and fair enforcement of expectations reinforces trust and respect. The reciprocal respect, or kistenimitowin, and trust developed in the culturally affirming personal relationship between the teacher and the student mean the student is then willing to follow the lead of the teacher in classroom endeavours. The teacher’s use of kiskinaumagehin (direct instruction) then becomes effective.

The development of the student-teacher relationship in the first category changes the student’s level of engagement in learning. The processes enacted in
the first category connect the student to the teacher with the result that the student is now more willing to do things asked of him by the teacher. In Category 2, the teacher connects the student to the class. She does so in a way that creates a social system that acknowledges and respects the students’ sociocultural and ethnocultural situation. While in the first category the emphasis of the teacher is with the individual, in this category the focus is on the students learning to enact positive social relationships of *weechihitowin* (supporting and helping each other), *weechiyauguneetowin* (partnerships), *ootetimitowin* (openness to others), and *weechiseechigenitowin* (alliances for common action). These first two categories together reflect the Nehinuw view of the importance of both individual and collective relationships in human endeavours.

To facilitate the connection of students to the class, in addition to reassurances in the private, interpersonal relationship of the first category, the teacher indicates publicly, in the social domain, that she values Indigenous peoples and their cultures. The norm of respect for indigeneity (and other differences) is established and enforced for student-student and student-class interactions. When students feel respected, they reciprocate with respect for others in the class. Creating familiarity and acquainting students with their physical and social surroundings engenders a sense of belonging. The sense of safety and belonging in the physical and social environment reduces the need for vigilant self-protection, otherwise important for survival in oppressive and discriminatory environments. When students experience a sense of safety, it enables them to focus on the learning activities of the class.

The teacher also respectfully acknowledges the stresses of children from families and communities affected by colonization. The teacher is attentive to the impact of social issues affecting Indigenous communities and deals with the effects in a matter-of-fact, respectful manner. She strives to alleviate student stress by establishing activities or classroom structures through which the emotional tension in children’s lives is given positive expression. The interaction of students in the emotional domain helps them learn to empathize with others, reduces feelings of isolation, and develops bonds among students.

As students give expression to the situation of their personal life, the teacher reinforces appropriate social behaviour. This social behaviour is often developed in group work, where the social skills of listening, sharing, and taking turns are taught and reinforced. Students learn how to treat others with respect and how to ensure they are treated with respect themselves.

Student interaction and sharing in the classroom lead to the development of student leadership and joint authority, which approximates the Nehinuw
mode of *kiskinaumatowin*, where students are learning from one another, and *kiskinaumasowin*, which is self-teaching and learning. The teacher uses situational leadership (see Sammel, Lindis, and Goulet 2013 for a more detailed discussion of situational leadership): leadership is direct or shared depending on the context, such as communicating high expectations for student learning or the joint construction of class norms followed by the use of direct teacher authority to enforce adherence to respectful norms and expectations. The equitable leadership style in the personal relationships developed in Category 1 means the role of the teacher is shared, when appropriate, with the students in this category. When students assume leadership and share their lives and views in the classroom, they shape the climate of the class and direction of learning. They have joint authority of the classroom with the teacher: decision making is thus more diffuse, arising from both the teacher’s and the students’ ideas about the class. When students participate in establishing behavioural norms, they are more likely to follow the norms and enforce them with others. The safety and belonging, emotional growth, social skills, and shared leadership and joint authority create a culturally sensitive, respectful social system, and a group identity that supports the norms of the classroom and the goals for learning.

Racism can thwart a child’s belief in his own abilities. In the classroom, an Indigenous student can be reluctant to participate if he does not believe he will experience success or that his achievements will be recognized by the teacher. If he tries, he does not want to see his work denigrated. The connections to the teacher and the class that are developed by the processes in the first two categories help draw a reluctant student into learning because through respect, trust has been established in the interpersonal and social system of the class. But the student still needs reassurance that he has the ability to perform the learning tasks with success. Instruction needs to be appropriate for the student’s social and cultural situation. The development of the social relationships in the first two categories allows the teacher to enact the different Nehinuw forms of teaching – *kiskinaumagehin* (teaching another), *kiskinaumasowin* (teaching oneself), and *kiskinaumatowin* (interactive teaching each other) – in Category 3 to better connect the students to the processes of learning.

In Category 3, the close relationship developed in Category 1 allows teacher planning to be based on the students’ interests and needs. Once learning begins, the teacher pays attention to her students’ progress to ensure they experience success. Pacing or the length of time spent on an aspect of learning in the classroom is based on student progress, reinforcing the feeling of joint ownership with the students. Shared leadership is also evident in this
category when students bring their knowledge to the classroom, making learning a shared endeavor. Creating space for students to share their knowledge means the cultural life and social situation of the students are represented and valued in the learning environment of the class.

Support for learning is accomplished by addressing the needs unique to Indigenous learners in the class in terms of cultural identity and racism. Language issues are addressed in a way that respects the children’s and the community’s speech patterns while preparing students for success with English in future schooling. The group skills described in Category 2 are used in this category as well to support the different levels of skill development in the class as peers support one another’s learning. Structures or activities that foster the appropriate expression of emotion in previous categories also serve in this category to inform the teacher about the emotional state of students so she can better adjust her expectations for learning that day for both the individuals and the class as a whole.

The close interpersonal bond developed in Category 1 enables the teacher to know the strengths and weaknesses of the student; she knows how to motivate the student and structure experiences to ensure the student will have a successful learning experience. Starting with a student’s strength and practising in a safe situation lessens the risk of public failure in an activity. Effective teachers use scaffolding appropriate to Indigenous students. Scaffolding (Gazden 1983; Sawyer 2006) is a term based on Vygotsky’s zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is the space in which a student cannot perform higher level thinking or complete a task on his own but is able to do so with the assistance of a more skilled person. Scaffolding is the support given to the learner that enables him to achieve that higher level of thinking, complete the task, or solve the problem that he was unable to on his own. Effective scaffolding lays down a path for the student to follow or creates a framework to support student cognition in the activity to ensure success.

The teaching approaches develop and reinforce the attributes of previous categories. Mastery learning (Bloom 1971) ensures student success with basic skills. Respect for resources is taught when students use manipulatives and concrete materials. Social skills are reinforced, since students are expected to share materials. Storytelling, or achimowin, reflects the emphasis of Nehinuw on the oral tradition. In the classroom, storytelling humanizes and contextualizes knowledge, connecting students to others. Relationships between the teacher and students are strengthened when personal stories are used to illustrate learning. Stories of Indigenous peoples or others in similar oppressive
situations help students understand their own social situation and connect the curriculum to the reality of their lives. One-on-one teaching provides the safety of not having to perform in front of others when students are unsure of themselves. It enables the teacher to become aware of the individual's understanding of the learning, thereby reinforcing the attribute of meeting individual needs. The talking circle is a venue for emotional expression, the development of social skills and student leadership, the practice of achimowin, and student input into the knowledge construction of the class. The students' leadership of the topics provides the teacher with insight as to how she can better connect the curriculum to the lives of the students. The development of social skills also takes place in group work, which provides for student peer support. Group work, or kiskinaumatowin (teaching each other), uses all four domains, as students learn content, interact with one another using the skills and values of mamuwit-utoskehin (working together), and enjoy learning together and from one another.

Experiential (Kolb 1984), community, activity- and land-based learning connect classroom learning to the real world and to student life outside the class. This connection reinforces the inclusion of self and culture in the construction of a culturally meaningful learning environment. When learning is personalized, the social and emotional domains become incorporated into learning. Because personalization brings the topic close to the students' experiences, they have strong feelings for it. They are able to express all parts of themselves, personally and culturally. These hands-on strategies alleviate student boredom, bringing life to the learning and enacting the movement inherent in the Nehinuw concept of pimatsiwin (life). The classroom and the community become connected, so learning becomes situated in a present-day community with a history that helps students understand their life today.

As the student participates in the learning process and experiences success, he comes to believe in his ability to achieve. The student is thus more willing to engage in learning. The belief in self is reinforced as the teacher sets standards for achievement and clarifies expectations for responsible attainment of those standards. The development in Category 2 of a group identity supportive of learning goals enhances each student's willingness to act responsibly. Culturally appropriate instruction means the teacher incorporates learning activities that develop a positive self-concept and positive cultural identity, which expands the student's belief in his own and his people's abilities. Recognition of achievement reinforces responsible engagement in learning. As self-confidence develops, the student becomes a more independent learner,
more willing to take responsibility for his own learning, or *kiskinaumasowin* (teaching oneself). When this self-reliance is combined with the shared leadership of the previous category, it leads to the emergence of a responsible, self-directed learner.

As the student moves into Category 4, the last category of the model, he is now connected to the teacher, other students, and the process of learning. At the same time, given the uniqueness of Indigenous cultures, it is important that resources used in learning are congruent with the thinking and world view of the student. Too often, this is not the case: learning resources have for the most part been developed for use with Euro-Canadian students and based on Euro-Canadian content and structures of thinking. In Category 4, the teacher ensures that the content being taught is relevant to the cultural life of her students, so that they can relate to and understand the material (*nisitootumowin*).

In the model of effective teaching, the personal relationship in Category 1 means the teacher knows her student — that is, his cultural background and his interests. By having his culture positively represented in the classroom, she is better able to entice the student into participation. The curriculum reinforces who the student is as an Indigenous person, and thus he comes to believe in the curriculum, since he no longer encounters overt examples of Eurocentrism and racism, or if he does, the teacher explains the injustice of that position.

Her personal relationship with the student also allows the teacher to adjust the curriculum to suit the student’s interest. Interest in a topic both draws students in and maintains their engagement in learning. The social skills developed in the previous categories serve to sustain engagement in learning because peer pressure keeps students focused on the learning task, as can group work, especially for those students who favour learning in a social context. Working with others is also one way the teacher makes learning fun. Fun brings an emotional aspect to learning, as it heightens feelings that, in turn, assist in the retention of information.

The teacher uses cognitive mediators to support memory and cognition. Because learning is a shared endeavour in the model, the teachers and the students jointly develop many cognitive mediators. When mediators are derived from the students’ experiences, they match or are closely connected to the internal cognitive processes of the students. Through responsive teaching, the teacher selects mediators that vary to accommodate the different learning styles of students. The shared knowledge and leadership of the students provide teachers with insight into the mediators that have the most
meaning for the students. The more meaningful a cognitive mediator is to the learner, the more it can be accessed by the student's internal working memory to effectively support cognition.

Relationship building in this category occurs both inside and outside the classroom. Teachers connect with individuals, small groups, or organizations through weehiyauguneetowin (partnerships) and weechishechigemitowin (alliances for common action) to enhance classroom learning. The community is seen as both a source of knowledge and a network of human resources that, with the development of respectful relationships, will support and reinforce the goals of learning with the student. The cultures of the classroom and the community come together in the relationships with other staff members, families, and community members. Culturally meaningful knowledge construction for the classroom draws from both the Western world of the mandated curriculum and the Indigenous world and understanding of the community and the children.

Summary of the Model

The model uses a spiraling circle to represent the dynamic nature of the process of engaging Indigenous children in learning. Our description of the model may suggest linear movement from one category to the next but, in reality, teacher actions are cyclical, iterative, and recursive. Some of the actions in one category may be dependent on the development of other sub-categories. For example, some approaches, such as activity-based learning used in Category 3, may not be achievable unless the class as a whole is supportive of the learning goals developed through the teacher actions in Category 2. Similarly, before using concrete materials, some students may need to develop respect for the classroom environment to know how to interact appropriately when learning with concrete materials.

The features of the different categories are interrelated. What is an important action in one category, serving one purpose, appears again, sometimes in a different form, in another category, serving another purpose. The same is true for the Nehinuw concepts of interactivity, social relationships, individual and collective determination, and forms of teaching that are emphasized in different categories but also evident in others. For example, weechi (support and help) appears in its various forms throughout the model but especially, and initially, with the individual student in Category 1 and among the students in Category 2. Similarly, kiskinaumatowin (learning from each other) may be emphasized in Category 3, but it is also an important aspect of developing
positive social relationships in Category 2 and connected to the idea of the teacher reaching out to learn from others in Category 4. Thus, the process of engaging Indigenous students in learning takes place over time in a cyclical manner, as actions in one category serve to develop the features in another category, allowing the teacher to proceed to another subcategory or category. The time taken to move through the spiral depends on the context, including the background of the teacher. Though not always the case, it will often take longer for non-Indigenous teachers to connect with Indigenous students, because of the societal divide of racism. Indigenous students see a reflection of themselves in Indigenous teachers, which is often an asset in building relationships. With some children, regardless of the teacher, it takes a long time to develop close relationships of mutual trust. In some classes, student resistance to past colonial instruction is deep, so trust building and group skills have to be worked on for quite some time before responsible behaviour and joint authority with the class is achievable. In these contexts, time is needed to overcome the legacy of colonization, establish trust, and practice the norms of respectful responsibility in the school setting.

In practice, the model flows in a spiraling motion, but depending on the context of the classroom and the teacher’s gifts, she may start at any one point. Although most teachers start by building relationships with students, in classroom practice, the initiation of engagement in learning starts immediately, so different teachers emphasize different aspects of the model at different times, depending on their context and their unique approach to teaching in their situation. For example, Owen drew children into learning by engaging the students in games that taught mathematical skills. He built relationships with students by creating an informal, fun relationship of students to the school content. For Wanda, teaching in the inner-city school meant she always had new students arriving in her class. She had to constantly and quickly develop new relationships to draw students into the classroom while simultaneously maintaining the flow of teaching the class. Wanda was Euro-Canadian, and almost all of her students were Indigenous. She developed student mentors in her class so that when a new student arrived, his first connection was with his peers who were also Indigenous; trusting relationships would come more readily with them than with her as a non-Indigenous teacher. The student mentor would initiate the new student into the routines and joint responsibility of the class and connect the child to the physical and social space of the classroom.

This model emerged from what different teachers have highlighted as important in creating effective learning for Indigenous children. The model is a
representational configuration of the reality of engagement. As evident in Owen's and Wanda's approaches, there is no one path to follow. Instead, the model provides a conceptual framework that identifies important features to be considered when creating classrooms that successfully engage Indigenous children in learning.