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Fostering Aboriginal Leadership: Increasing Enrollment and Completion Rates in Canadian Post-Secondary Institutions

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Introduction

"...We therefore propose adopting as our mission that universities ensure First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students have equitable access to attend university and to complete their degrees. Our goal is equity in the number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students who complete university degrees, so that over time, the percentage of the Aboriginal population with university credentials is at least at the same level as the general population. We recognize that achieving this mission and goal must be a shared responsibility between our institutions, First Nations, Métis and Inuit governments and communities along with governments at the federal and provincial levels and the private sector. We recognize the important role First Nations, Métis and Inuit post-secondary institutions have in creating post-secondary opportunities for Indigenous peoples which might not otherwise exist and the role they play in preparing students for university. We must use our full capacity to meet the needs of Aboriginal peoples ..." (Simon, p. 1)

On November 9, 2007, the Aboriginal Roundtable helped create the Communiqué referenced above. It has a series of steps to make post-secondary education accessible to Aboriginal students; and it was issued by senior officials from twenty universities, First Nations and Métis educational institutions and governments over a two-day meeting at the University of Manitoba. The Communiqué states that university presidents are to provide 'leadership' in developing seven goals. These delegates pledged that the universities, First Nations and Métis governments, provincial and federal governments will meet to create a policy paper in the coming weeks (Simon, p. 1). It is a remarkable historical document involving every education stakeholder (Aboriginal political territorial organizations, Aboriginal post-secondary institutions, Canadian universities, and Canadian governments) which can shift the future of academic achievement for all Aboriginal students in elementary and secondary institutions. In addition, although its impact on other forms of post-secondary institutions such as colleges and institutes of various kinds across the country has yet to be determined, but it is plain that similar innovations and commitments are needed.

Leaders of post-secondary institutions, government and business leaders have pondered about the long-standing issue of Aboriginal education achievement for decades, and have actively recruited Aboriginal students. Nonetheless, they have continued to see relatively low completion rates. Some critics believe that this cultural group is in a competitively disadvantageous position compared to the general

population. They are said to be marketable on a smaller scale in leadership positions; so, the attainment of higher education will be a relatively slow process and the achievement of upward occupational mobility will likewise take a long time. The following research paper will address these questions from an Aboriginal perspective with regard to what I have termed "Aboriginal Intellectual Capital" (AIC). As well, I intend to argue that cultural leadership needs to be fostered in Aboriginal students in order to set the stage for them to become effective leaders and progressive agents of change in the arenas of education, politics and government.

Leaders have the ability to cause individuals to act willingly in a desired way for the benefit of the group, according to the Salacuse (2005). Similarly the Aboriginal model of leadership can be defined in terms of skills, abilities, and traditional gifts underlying an individual's traditional-spiritual name, clan, life experience, or what are commonly referred to as Aboriginal identity and cultural ties. Those who exhibit and recognize these elements of AIC are active leaders. An Aboriginal leader's development comes from the mentoring of peers, staff, and faculty; and from the community's traditional teachers, Healers and Elders. Aboriginal students are role models accountable to their communities and bearing leadership responsibilities to support and develop leadership characteristics in others.

Aboriginal people have philosophies with a holistic approach to learning that are imperative to Aboriginal leadership development. The Aboriginal worldview is needed in any long-term education strategies of Aboriginal students to increase the awareness of higher education and address cultural, financial and academic barriers. In my experience, Aboriginal people have faced tremendous challenges in addressing higher education and the cultural, financial, and academic barriers. In my opinion, Aboriginal people need to hone and build on these cultural leadership characteristics. As an Aboriginal Employment Counsellor and Academic/Financial Aid Counsellor for over ten years, in which I have worked closely with Aboriginal students in training and education programs, I have come to realize that their multiple responsibilities need particular attention and support services in order to help them succeed. Many students, I find, lack the financial means to enter post-secondary institutions based on limited band funds. They have difficulty, I find, in balancing their personal, school and family responsibilities. As well, I find there are many female student parents who are sole support providers for their families. Indeed, Aboriginal students face complex barriers compared to the general population and these obstacles inhibit educational achievement.

In 2005, the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) developed an accurate list of these student problems as: the residential school syndrome, lack of academic preparation, social discrimination, high unemployment and poverty, cultural differences in post-secondary institutions, and community and family responsibilities (OUSA, p. 4). The OUSA report stated that Aboriginal students need Aboriginal academic-based role models so that they can help others to overcome feelings of

high stress, isolation, inadequacy, and discrimination. The OUSA reported that many Aboriginal students withdraw from higher education because of serious obstacles such as personal and family issues, fear of competition and discrimination in obtaining a higher education (OUSA, p. 9). Based on my personal experience, I agree with many of the findings in the OUSA report and I especially agree with OUSA when they argued that there needs to be a holistic and collaborative strategy involving all education stakeholders (OUSA, p. 5).

This paper will focus on ways to build Aboriginal leadership in the education sector and ways to increase the enrollment of Aboriginal people in post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal completion rates in these institutions. I will also strive to incorporate some theories surrounding Aboriginal education and leadership, provide the basic differences between traditional Aboriginal leadership and western leadership, and give a statistical snapshot of current academic achievement rates. I will also provide evidence on the government's role in legislation affecting Aboriginal education, and then share some thoughts about contemporary academic issues.

Theories on Aboriginal Education and Leadership

Many theories seek to explain the education gap in academic achievement between Aboriginal people and the general population. A theory is a tool used to understand a specific problem. A theory also helps one understand the underlying reasons for problem (Schissel, 2003, p. 16). A theory is made up of assumptions (explicit and implicit) about the state of the problem and how it can be organized to link together ideas and empirical data on what we know about the problem (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 17). The theories presented will show that Aboriginal education has been largely conceptualized, described and analyzed from a Western perspective.

Liberal theorists associate the responsibility for success or failure with each person; so, in effect, they state individual rights need to be accommodated and individuals must be held personally accountable for their successes and failures. Their theory holds that academic achievement reflects an individual's level of capacity, effort, initiative and skill (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 17). These theorists would contend that Aboriginal people have the same opportunities as everyone else, so the onus is on them to seek higher education and to reach their educational goals. In other words, they believe that those with less education possess little initiative, capability, or investment in education processes (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 18).

A related Western approach (not far removed from the "social Darwinism" of Herbert Spencer) advances the belief that biological determinants explain racialized stratification. It contends that policy and economic frameworks reflect racially based patterns of isolation, and that dependency deprives individuals of their potential and restricts them from engaging in activities needed for social success. Thomas Flanagan, for example, has argued that policies are needed break down Aboriginal

culture and to promote the complete assimilation of Aboriginal people into the dominant society. He thinks the government should stop intervening and offering assistance programs, and let Aboriginal people make their own way (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 18). However, I believe in Schissel's argument that liberal approaches do not take into account the impact of structural inequalities and the continuing barriers to equitable participation and outcomes. Government has tried to ignore Aboriginal rights even though there are legal and institutional frameworks acknowledging their rights, not least section 25 of the Canadian Constitution (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 19).

Schissel provides a compelling critique of the liberal approach of human capital theory, which stresses the importance of competitive individualism. In the alternative, he shows the need to invest in the knowledge and education of Aboriginal people to promote personal growth, community improvement and the general economy. This theory discounts "inherent" individual limitations and acknowledges the need for a social or policy commitment to build on individual capacities. This theory also views Aboriginal people as an untapped resource that can enhance the Canadian labour market. Likewise, this theory can be linked with the rising Aboriginal population and the need for higher education to expand qualified and job ready individual (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p.19). Schissel supports the principle that Aboriginal people have and can continue to have cultural differences that can be of benefit in the context of a pluralistic society.

Cultural theories, like this one, acknowledge that the members of a certain cultural group share characteristics of a common heritage and identity. They accept that they have different needs from members of the mainstream culture. This diversity, however, is not a detriment to society in general; in fact, it enhances the quality of life for all, while simultaneously encouraging the accommodation of minority group needs rather than forcibly assimilating them into the dominant culture. Western approaches generally hold that Western society has educational standards that are superior and assume that Aboriginal people need to assimilate for academic achievement (Schissel & Wotherspoon, 2003, p. 11). On the contrary, the recognition of the value of Aboriginal cultural leadership skills can help Aboriginal students to succeed in a Western educational system, and the cultural knowledge of Aboriginal people can have a reciprocally beneficial effect on the dominant society. Aboriginal cultural knowledge that needs to be acknowledged in any education strategies to recruit and retain Aboriginal students in higher education, and that acknowledgement can have salutary effects on that system itself.

Post-secondary education often becomes inaccessible to Aboriginal people based on three factors which I think only lightly covers the subject. Aisaican argues first, that students must have the academic background and motivation to gain entry into post-secondary institutions. I believe, however, that transitional programs can adequately prepare a student with some academic background. Secondly, he stresses students need a "funding mechanism" to pay for their studies with which I

strongly agree. Lastly, he argued that students need a support system beyond their immediate and extended family with which I also agree (Aisaican, 2001, p. 2). The three realities that he says are required for high academic achievement are: good academic skills, adequate financial resources and social stability. A university student without two of these factors he found will have difficulty in their studies. He did add, however that the majority of Aboriginal students have other problems affecting their inclusion and integration into the post-secondary system (Aisaican, 2001, p. 3). Thus, I found Aisaican's paper too vague as he chose not to include examples in each principle and he did not try to fully explain the evidence to support his rationale.

Aboriginal Leadership and Western Leadership

The AIC presented earlier in the paper gives a solid definition of the qualities and characteristics in an Aboriginal leader. In my opinion, I believe that every Aboriginal individual can be leader. However, I am trying to make the case that we need community Aboriginal leaders in academia. I find that the definition of an Aboriginal in Canada is a controversial one. I choose to define an Aboriginal as an individual who self-identifies and can demonstrate that they have genetic and cultural ties to their First Nation, Métis, Inuit group. An Aboriginal, I believe, is a person who has been taught and who has some understanding of their ancestral traditional teachings. Traditional teachings are difficult to learn; that is why Elders often tell us to listen to their teachings repeatedly to fully understand. In the following paragraph, I will speak generally about the differences between Aboriginal leadership and Western leadership, but keep in mind that Western leadership has exercised much political power and control over the lives of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal leadership has been dramatically affected by Western leadership's government and educational system. The residential school system is one example of how the government and churches tried to assimilate Aboriginal children which, I contend, is a major factor in the current problems experienced by Aboriginal people. Aboriginal children were forced by these two groups to attend residential schools. They were taught by priests and nuns. These two parties participated in destroying Aboriginal cultural leadership. Often, these children were victims of abuse when they spoke their language and displayed their cultural values (Aisaican, 2001, p. 4). The children were not loved, appreciated and encouraged (Aisaican, 2001, p. 15). In the aftermath, many Aboriginal people did not acquire a higher education, which led to continued poverty and segregation from mainstream society (Aisaican, 2001, p. 4). The Department of Indian Affairs began closing residential schools in 1965 (Stonechild, 2006, p. 40). Then the government created joint school agreements in which they bused children to nearby schools off-reserve; but they, too, were inadequate in meeting the needs of Aboriginal children and youth. Again, the Aboriginal children and youth felt "misunderstood, unwelcomed, and poorly supported" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 24). The Western government and educational system left psychological and social scars on Aboriginal people, which turned into problems such as alcoholism, violence and a loss of spirit (OUSA, 2005,

p. 6). Overall, cultural leadership was not protected by the Western government and educational system.

Afterwards, Aboriginal people realized that they needed to apply pressure on the government to have their own control over their educational endeavors. The reasons for this proactive approach is that personal accounts of residential schools revealed negative outcomes, which destabilized their lives, communities, and cultures (Schissel, 2003, p. 24). The residential school system and treaties dispossessed the people of their cultural beliefs and lands (Anderson, p. 2). The colonization process removed Aboriginal people from their lands, undermined family and community support structures, and destroyed individual and community capacities (Schissel, 2003, p. 29). Structural approaches in theories of internal colonialism have explained the inequalities between the Aboriginal population and general population (Schissel, 2003, p. 15). Residential schools affected Aboriginal people's lives, aspirations and prospects (Schissel, 2003, p. 29). Their educational practices affected Aboriginal identities, social interactions, and their education options (Schissel, 2003, p. 30). Scholars and community members emphasize that decolonization needs to start with Aboriginal people regaining control over their lives, identities and culture (Schissel, 2003, p. 27). These illustrations provide an adequate background of the ways that government tried to assimilate and destroy cultural leadership. Moreover, this government and church partnership attempted to break the self-esteem of Aboriginal people by destroying their cultural leadership ties (traditional and spiritual teachings) needed for survival and adaptation.

Aboriginal people have faced many barriers in their pursuit of a higher education when measured against Western society's education and skills (Aisaican, p. 4). One of the reasons for lower academic achievement is that the cultural leadership was negatively impacted by the Western school system. The children were prevented from learning and practicing their cultural knowledge and leadership skills in the school system (Aisaican, 2001, p. 4). Aisaican argued that traditional Aboriginal leadership consisted of a culture and identity needed for survival. I want to expand on his argument that Aboriginal cultural knowledge and leadership is also connected to the Aboriginal individual's family, clan, elders and community (Aisaican, 2001, p. 6). For this reason, Aboriginal staff, as leaders, who work in educational institutions play a far more important role in building the leadership of their students. Aboriginal cultural knowledge and leadership pertain to traditional teachings of morals and values that govern their responsibilities to each other and the natural environment (Anderson, p. 7). I agree with Anderson, that Aboriginal knowledge and leadership is very important to learn and needs to be nurtured.

It is important that students have their cultural knowledge in their traditional name, clan, ceremonies and practices, Nation, gifts or talents, in order to rise above their life challenges and reach a higher education (Anderson, p. 9). Likewise, it is vital that Aboriginal people secure a strong identity to help themselves and their communities, since they play

an important role in their Nation as Aboriginal leaders.

Current Academic Achievement Rates

Low academic achievement rates among Aboriginal people can be attributed to the Western education system. The Western educational institutions have controlled Aboriginal education. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal people (RCAP) recommended that the Western education system ought to consult more with Aboriginal leaders to create curriculum and Aboriginal post-secondary schools. Statistical records showed that, in 1996, there was an estimated 54% drop-out rate for Aboriginal students compared to the 35% of the general population. The 2001 Census statistics showed a 48% drop-out rate for Aboriginal students compared to 35% of the general population. In addition, the university completion rate was very low in 1996, and fell lower in 2001. In my opinion, these statistics reflect the limited funding from Indian and Northern Affairs of Canada (INAC) for First Nation Bands, or Reserves, to provide post-secondary education to its members; at the same time, the rising demand of those wanting a higher education has been stonewalled in their efforts to access funds for PSEs.

Priority systems are currently in place in which Bands have determined what category each of their band members are in when it comes to funding purposes. It is not necessarily the band administrators fault entirely. The fact that there are limited funds sometimes results in mechanisms which determine who can and cannot get an education. It is heart-breaking to hear a student crying when their band cannot fund them due to the priority systems in place. Aboriginal students are put in a precarious situation, and this rejection from their band is a difficult one, especially if they have not asked their band for help before. Often as an Aboriginal Student Counsellor, I am left trying to explain to the distraught student about INAC's role, the limited and capped band funds, and priority systems within band post-secondary education policies. As a result, some Aboriginal students will apply for the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), but good credit is an indicator on those who get approved. OSAP, however, is an option that means further debt to them, especially since they largely come from impoverished families.

According to Mendelson, the Aboriginal population will never catch up and achieve parity (Mendelson, 2006, p. 10). I believe academic achievement can increase as long as Aboriginal leaders work closely with their PSE leaders in governance to create and expand innovative Aboriginal programs and services to help in aggressive recruiting and outreach efforts and supportive services in the education systems. I agree with Mendelson that these students are taking longer to complete their degree, but he fails to realize that many of these students have more barriers and/or responsibilities than the general student population (Mendelson, 2006, p. 13).

When post-secondary administrators and educators join Aboriginal leaders in designing education strategies to increase academic achievement levels for the Aboriginal population, progress will happen in

recruitment and retention levels. To explain, education strategies need to be strengthened amongst all education stakeholders, and this may mean the leaders in PSE need greater visibility, so they do not appear as intimidating to prospective students. The post secondary institutions in my opinion are weak in their outreach efforts in the Aboriginal community. Perhaps more PSE staff can frequent more Aboriginal events and cultural activities during and after work hours to increase their visibility to community members. Another suggestion is the creation of jointly sponsored programs between the Aboriginal community organizations and the post-secondary institutions, like after-school and work programs. Other areas I would like to recommend are to find ways to increase financial aid, diversify the Aboriginal curriculum, and institute more flexible pedagogical methods in academic programs throughout the post-secondary system.

Like Mendelson, I believe that the academic achievement gap results from an unequal and less inclusive society (Mendelson, 2006, p. 19). We need to look at successful post-secondary education models and that have high Aboriginal student populations. For example, Saskatoon has a relatively high university completion rate. Mendelson found completion rates tended to be higher in Saskatoon partly because they have Aboriginal PSE institutions (Mendelson, p. 22).

In summary, Aboriginal students tend to do better in PSE institutions today than the past (Rae Report 2005, Statistics Canada 2003). Also Mendelson believes if PSE institutions were to enroll more Aboriginal students, then they would need more specialized programs and assistance, more loans and bursaries, increments to federal financing for First Nations PSE, and Aboriginal-controlled institutions (Mendelson, 2006, p. 29). I agree with Mendelson that we ought to try to increase enrolment and success rates of Aboriginal students in the PSE (Mendelson, 2006, p. 35). One of the ways to make social changes, I believe, as Mendelson does, is to deeply grasp the fact that Aboriginal people, as much as other Canadians, need a higher education. Higher Aboriginal high school completion rates are important, but I find transitional programs to PSE institutions are beneficial for mature students too. Even though his report focused on increasing the number of Aboriginal youth completing high school, he also advocated policies to promote higher educational achievement in a PSE setting (Mendelson, 2006, p. 35). It is vital that Aboriginal leadership, government and post-secondary institutions work closely together to fill this education gap in academic achievement rates.

Government's Role in Aboriginal Education

Aboriginal people face academic difficulties in Western post-secondary institutions in today's society, based on historical factors and on past, dysfunctional government interference. Previous government legislation and policies were created to assimilate the Aboriginal people in order to make them conform to Western thought rather than to maintain their cultural knowledge and ways of life. It was not until a shift in Aboriginal leadership that communities started to apply pressure on

the federal government to listen to them. The Native Indian Brotherhood (NIB), formed in 1970, applied pressure on Indian Affairs to increase Aboriginal participation in PSE. In 1974, the Red Power Movement led a Native Caravan to Ottawa (Stonechild, 2006, p. 47). My mother and I were community demonstrators at the Toronto City Hall. The caravan's objective was to show that "the hereditary and treaty rights of all Native peoples in Canada must be recognized and confirmed in the Constitution of Canada" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 47). The government and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police saw the caravan and the Red Power movement as a threat to national security (Stonechild, 2006, p. 47). As a result, of Native pressure, Judd Buchanan, the Indian Affairs Minister met with the Executive Council of NIB and a group of cabinet ministers to form a Special Cabinet Committee in 1974.

The committee met once or twice to review Aboriginal issues (Stonechild, 2006, p. 47). Then, in 1975, the Special Cabinet Committee was replaced by the Joint Cabinet and Native Indian Brotherhood Committee (JNCC) in 1975. The first item on the agenda of the committee was education. The NIB pushed for two principles, which were that the government must accept responsibility for funding all education for Aboriginal people, must expand band funding to develop higher education initiatives (Stonechild, 2006, p. 48). Another important NIB proposal sent to Buchanan was a section that contained "The Education Right of the Mature Indian" (Stonechild, 2006, p. 49). This section extended the statutory education funding to all Aboriginal people, and it included mature Indians over the age of 15 entitling them to a PSE. Funding of Aboriginal Education was seen as a treaty obligation (Stonechild, 2006, p. 49). The federal government responded that Aboriginal funding was unfair to Canadians who do not have access to free adult post-secondary education (Stonechild, p. 50).

I disagree with the federal government's argument here, mainly because they made no reference to the treaties, and it showed they dishonoured the treaty rights for the education of Aboriginal people. When Noel Starblanket decided to pull the NIB out of the joint committee, relations with the federal government relations unfortunately weakened and the government reversed its stance that higher education for Indians is a right according to the Indian Act (Stonechild, 2006, p. 51). For its part, the NIB supported more access to funding for Indians to enter university even without treaty ties, and Aboriginal leadership played a vital role in changing government legislation to fund Aboriginal education.

As a result, access to PSE increased for Aboriginal people. Then, in 1977, Indian Affairs created a Post-Secondary Education Assistance program (PSEAP) to meet the Native peoples' demand. The goals of the PSEAP were to encourage enrolment and to fund the maximum number of students who qualified for entrance (Stonechild, 2006, p. 63). The PSEAP provided virtually every student with funding once accepted into PSE institution. In 1983, the Indian and Northern Affairs Evaluation Branch report showed that it spent \$34.1 million with 6500 students enrolled. As well, it concluded that the PSEAP had met its objective that

Aboriginal achievement in PSE was comparable to that of mainstream society, and that employment rates for graduates were equal to the country's norm. Therefore, Indian Affairs gave funding directly to bands for program administration, and suggested that Tribal Councils improve the program. According to Stonechild, PSE institutions did not play an important role in creating Aboriginal higher education policy, but they did create Native Studies programs (Stonechild, 2006, p. 65). Eventually PSE institutions accepted more Aboriginal students and Aboriginal programs. Later, some PSE institutions began to fund Aboriginal programs and, eventually, Aboriginal participation rates expanded (Stonechild, 2006, p. 68). However, the 1996 RCAP criticized the roles played by PSE institutions, and stated that Aboriginal students were expected to "fit in." The RCAP reported lower completion rates and attributed them to the fact that students felt "isolated" by racist attitudes and opinions (Stonechild, 2006, p. 60). The report urged the universities to accommodate Aboriginal culture and identity as their core responsibility and to commit to Aboriginal programs and support services in their operation budgets (Stonechild, p. 70). I agree with Stonechild's argument that the government must enact legislation to assist Aboriginal PSE institutions with permanent funding as a legitimate entitlement. In this way, the importance of Aboriginal education can be recognized in a meaningful way. Aboriginal PSEs are important and I do believe, like Stonechild, that they need more funding. At the same time, they must maintain high standards and not become "ghetto" institutions. Aboriginal leaders that are highly educated and motivated need to pursue the "new buffalo", too, so that they can lead others and make additional improvements in education (Stonechild, 2006, p. 138).

Contemporary Academic Issues

One way that Aboriginal people will begin to break the cycle is when they have equitable access to a PSE, in order to become competitive, to earn higher incomes and to take their place as Aboriginal leaders. Aboriginal people need to tell their own stories to help others understand their intellectual and cultural knowledge (Smith, 1999, p. 3). Smith stresses that we need more Aboriginal people working as academics and researchers to help with our social issues within a framework of self-determination, decolonization and social justice (Smith, 1999, p. 4). It is also vital that Aboriginal intellectuals with Western education write or speak from a "real" or "authentic" Aboriginal position. Aboriginal scholars must accept the responsibility of being leaders for their communities. They are accountable to their community. As leaders they can work within a scholarly Aboriginal worldview and a western worldview. Aboriginal scholars may be educated in a Western institution, but they also bring with them "their class interests, their values and their ways of thinking" (Smith, 1999, p. 69). Therefore, it is vital that Aboriginal students access a PSE with cultural connections in order that they will produce scholarly work and attract more Aboriginal students with a leadership voice.

Traditional Aboriginal societies and academic institutions play a significant role in supporting their Aboriginal students in post-secondary

institutions. The term traditional Aboriginal society means the Aboriginal community (First Nations, Inuit, Metis) to which an individual belongs. As stated by Fanon (cited in Smith, 1999), Aboriginal students become educated and acculturated in the West; as a result, Aboriginal students enter three phases, which I think affects their leadership development. They have to prove that they can be educated in the Western society. They become disturbed with the way that their people are represented in Western society. They then, as intellectuals, need to recall who they are, ponder the past, and seek to join with their people "to produce a revolutionary and national literature" (Smith, 1999, p. 70). For this reason, Aboriginal students need to be culturally grounded to understand their leadership role to their communities, and those who do succeed in higher education are to be commended for they are the role models for the next generations.

According to Maori scholar and activist, Linda Tuwai Smith, Aboriginal communities have struggled over leadership, representation and voice between those individuals viewed as traditional or those having Western credentials. PSE institutions should try to attract Aboriginal students who are connected to their cultural group. I strongly agree with Smith's stance that Aboriginal scholars who are closely connected to their cultural group (Reservation, local Aboriginal Community, immediate and extended Aboriginal family) are better able to understand the real problems that the majority of our people are faced with (Smith, 1999, pp. 71-72). Indigenous scholar Smith's introduction of herself showed how important her identity is to her. She claimed her descent lines come from both her parents. She named her tribal groups and close links to family and community. She is grounded with "her sense of place" by her grandmother who taught her the Aboriginal ways of knowing (Smith, 1999, p. 12). She is knowledgeable about indigenous pedagogies through stories, values and practices. As well, she attended cultural events to sustain those community connections (Smith, 1999, p. 15). It is important that Aboriginal students sustain a cultural connection as leaders in their communities while they obtain a Western education.

Recommendations for Increasing Aboriginal Leadership in Post Secondary Education

Aboriginal educational achievement can increase when every education stakeholder works in a collaborative relationship. Post-secondary institutions need to show their commitment to support Aboriginal student programs and services. Similar to the Edmonton Public Schools, college and university leadership need "to provide the necessary support services and programming to improve Aboriginal student achievement, retention and graduation" (Leask, p. 1). My own recommendation is that universities should provide cultural teachings to Aboriginal staff and faculty, and should increase Aboriginal programming, so as to create a trickle down effect to students. Aboriginal staff as leaders can contribute in a supportive capacity to give advice and direction, and to make recommendations to PSE institutions on matters related to Aboriginal students. As well, a community advisory committee made up of Elders, Aboriginal students and representatives of

Aboriginal organizations should be created to provide advice on such areas, like recruitment activities.

My growing concern has always been this: Are PSE institutions doing their best to recruit students and potential Aboriginal scholars? This is, I believe an important question, because Aboriginal students closely connected to their identity and community can make valuable contributions in academia. It also concerns me that Aboriginal students are tomorrow's intellectuals, and I would hope that their scholarly work would have a positive impact on our communities in the future. The Aboriginal community has so much to gain if their Aboriginal scholars are fulfilling the needs of their people on a cultural, social, economic and political level. In short, I have just written on community accountability as a leadership element in the context of scholarly work, but I believe quite strongly with Stonechild that, if each educated Aboriginal person persevered and made changes to advance our communities, we would be a stronger cultural group.

Also I believe there is a growing need for Aboriginal leaders to secure closer working relationships with all education stakeholders. Some of Mendelson's recommendations in his paper that I believe warrant consideration are presented in different ways. He recommends that bands, government and Aboriginal organizations need to work together to set targets to increase grade 12 completions with target dates, and that targets need to be geographically specific. He calls for a means to measure academic achievement. The first challenge is to identify these students for administrative purposes, but at the same time to protect their privacy. We need to get good data and track them. A trustworthy agency should do this work and have trust from all parties. He suggested that the First Nations Statistical Institute can be mandated to develop data sources, monitor and report on results. And he has even suggested the possibility of a partnership between Statistics Canada and the First Nations Statistical Institute to do this work. His report also argues that Aboriginal PSE institutions and programs are needed. We need to find the successes and set out a methodology in detail and replicate it. We need to identify and disseminate information on what works. An agency needs to be mandated to do this (Mendelson, 2006, p. 36-37). Most definitely, Aboriginal leaders need to initiate a stronger approach in working with all education stakeholders.

As well, I was intrigued by the OUSA's report which made recommendations with a holistic and collaborative approach for all education stakeholders. The two strategies that OUSA reported were: to create external initiatives to develop an understanding of post-secondary opportunities for students; and to develop individual study skills to ensure early access programs that are recruited in Aboriginal communities by schools and organizations to support their program information (OUSA, 2005, p. 7). They also recommended more academic preparation for Aboriginal high school students. For instance, the government could invest in quality education in communities to increase post-secondary participation in the community delivery of education. They also argued that the postsecondary institutions need to

provide academic support, personal support, access to an Elder and cultural space. The report also focused on long-term strategies, which increase the awareness of program development and peer mentoring to address cultural, social and academic barriers. In addition, the OUSA made some excellent recommendations in their report such as: the provincial government auditing participation rates in cooperation with institutions, Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal governments, and First Nations support services; (b) the provincial government ought to set up enrollment goals and monitor enrollment targets; (c) specific programs to increase Aboriginal participation in universities should be developed; and, (d) a graduation scholarship to encourage the completion of secondary school should be created (OUSA, 2005, p. 10-12). The report's holistic and collaborative approach promotes Aboriginal leadership by making stakeholders accountable to the Aboriginal education achievement outcomes.

In the recently published booklet "Success in Your Studies," Brent Stonefish gave some good recommendations for Aboriginal post-secondary students like himself. One of his suggestions was that students need to keep their focus and vision on the certificate, diploma or degree sought. He also made no qualms about the fact that there will always be obstacles and life changes that will affect one's vision. He went on to mention that students' time and feelings will always be a factor in their lives, but they must strive to keep the original vision (Stonefish, 2007, p. 11). Stonefish added that students need to cope with stress by maintaining good time management, organization, a good study environment, learning style, optimism and sleep (Stonefish, 2007, p. 27). I liked that as an Aboriginal student he used his traditional teachings to guide him in his educational journey. Similarly, I strongly agreed with him that Aboriginal students should remember who they are, where they come from, and who their ancestors are. He also stressed that Aboriginal students can learn in a Western education system and still maintain their Aboriginal identity. We need more Aboriginal scholars like Stonefish to set examples for others. As well, I agreed with him when he stated that educated Aboriginal students help themselves, their family, their community and their Nation (Stonefish, 2007, p. 34).

The Aboriginal Roundtable was a historical event. Held on November 8, 2007, it involved each stakeholder with a vested interest in Aboriginal educational achievement. I believe this results-oriented discussion will positively change the completion rates for all Aboriginal students. Federal under-funding is a barrier for post-secondary education of Aboriginal youth. Here, Chief Phil Fontaine of the Assembly of First Nations stated that federal funding for education needs to be increased by \$2 billion to university presidents and government leaders. He also stated that First Nations Bands do not have the funding for ten thousand deserving youth wanting a PSE. As well, the Grand Chief Ron Evans of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs recommended that PSE leadership set a goal to admit 20% to 50% of Aboriginal students that apply (Martin, p. 1); however, he did not give a target date. As a result, if aggressive Aboriginal recruitment efforts take place with partnering PSE institutions, then financial adjustment to budgets and expansion,

especially in Aboriginal student services need to happen too. Most Canadian college and universities have a few or no staff in Aboriginal student services. I believe that all universities and colleges in Canada should re-assess their recruitment efforts and retention levels of Aboriginal students. This Aboriginal Roundtable discussion led to the creation of the Communiqué which resulted in University Presidents creating seven goals to engage all education stakeholders to work together to increase educational achievement rates.

Aboriginal learning is an area that needs to be explored for Aboriginal leadership to develop. Aboriginal learning styles may be a missing link in Aboriginal student retention and achievement outcomes. According to Michael Johnny, the holistic learning process must teach the adult learner the concept of life-long learning that incorporates human development (Johnny, 2002, p. 6). This learning cycle begins with what he describes as a "a spiritual, or intuitive sense-an awareness of one's need in relation one's self, family, community, nation, and/or one's place in the universe" (Johnny, 2002, p. 6). According to Johnny, everyone moves in the learning cycle of awareness, struggle, building, and preservation (Johnny, 2002, p. 6). From an Aboriginal perspective, Diane Hill found that "healing is learning according to a traditional aboriginal view of education" and she also stated life-long learning is a guiding principle in Aboriginal teachings (Johnny, 2002, p. 36). I agree with Hill when she states that education can benefit Aboriginal people once they emphasize Aboriginal approaches and philosophies in learning (Johnny, 2002, p. 36). A recent development, which really excited me, is the new report called "Redefining How Success is Measured in First Nations, Inuit and Métis Learning" in which this comprehensive document outlines the key characteristics of holistic life-long learning for First Nations, Inuit and Métis; identifies data gaps and challenges that limit our understanding of Aboriginal learning; presents three draft Holistic life-long learning models for First Nations, Inuit and Métis; and it proposes how each mode can be used to develop a national, holistic framework for measuring life-long learning (Johnny, 2002, p. 3). This report identifies Aboriginal holistic life-long learning models for each group, and they want to use this cultural knowledge to develop policies and programs to best meet Aboriginal learning needs. This document has the potential to empower Aboriginal learners, their family, their community and the education system to make changes (Johnny, 2002, p. 3). It is hoped that Aboriginal Leaders in education will review this document and include these new approaches to learning, in order to develop new ways of thinking about measuring learning for Aboriginal people and education achievement outcomes. All in all, I believe that each education stakeholder needs to collaborate on new creative ways to approach how to recruit and retain Aboriginal students, even if it means changes in policies, structures and financial mechanisms.

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