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Indigenous Students within Higher Education

Introduction by Dawn Zinga (Brock) and Michelle Pidgeon (SFU)

In this e-book we focus on exploring the complex contexts and realities of Indigenous students in higher education and the important role of Indigenous student services. When Indigenous¹ students pursue studies at higher education institutions their transition will be like that of many other students entering into a new context with new levels of autonomy and new expectations but unlike their fellow classmates their very identities have been politicized and add different layers onto the transition experience. Like their classmates, Indigenous students have unique family backgrounds and cultural experiences that may find resonance with other students from similar backgrounds but unlike their classmates they consciously and/or unconsciously carry the history of colonization and the scars that colonial acts have inflicted on themselves, their families, and their peoples. They are entering into institutions of higher learning that at one point required enfranchisement (the unwilling relinquishing of Indian status) as a condition of admission as required by an amendment to the 1876 Indian Act.

The majority of faculty, staff and administrators in higher education fail to appreciate the impact of colonial relations on Indigenous students' transition to postsecondary institutions and are largely unaware of how alien and unwelcoming campuses can be to Indigenous students.

Many students face these challenges alone while others access support through Indigenous-focused programs, Indigenous faculty, Indigenous community members, and occasionally non-Indigenous faculty who have extensive experience working within Indigenous contexts. Indigenous student services in many higher education contexts have also provided support and other resources to assist Indigenous students both in their transition experience and in the successful completion of their studies.

Setting the Context: Contested Spaces in Higher Education

(Dawn Zinga Brock University)

Higher education is meant to challenge what students know and expose them to a variety of ways of thinking. Many students report questioning their beliefs and understandings of the world as they complete their education. Higher education is an important period in life that is not meant to question a students' core identity and culture yet this is what many Indigenous students face in their pursuit of a degree and more opportunities. According to Battiste (2013), education and its associated institutions are "neither culturally neutral nor fair" (p. 159) and Canadian education systems have been created out of a "patriarchal, Eurocentric society." Thus, the higher education



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contexts continue to oppress individuals on the basis of gender, group identification, and cultural background while also serving to reaffirm the privilege and status of mainstream individuals. These systems simultaneously devalue and subjugate Indigenous students as not fitting the mainstream mold while seeking to assimilate them into “proper” university material and global “citizens”. The education systems’ self-perpetuating cycle ensures those who are seen to be mainstream are indoctrinated in the beliefs and ideologies that act to subjugate and devalue beliefs, ideologies and peoples who do not fit the prescribed mold. Thus, the individual students, staff, administrators and instructors within these institutions also serve to perpetuate the imposition of colonial power.

Colonial power and colonial histories are embedded within the structures, policies, procedures and classrooms of higher education contexts and continue to function largely unexamined and unquestioned by the individuals in charge of these institutions. Yet, at the same time, administrators seek out Indigenous students and then cannot understand why their specialized outreach programs for Indigenous students are not more effective. Deer (2011) argues that while higher education institutions recruit Indigenous students and seek to make campuses more welcoming by providing space and opportunities for ceremonies, creating support centres, increasing the number of Indigenous faculty and staff as well as establishing new buildings designed around Indigenous worldviews they

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simultaneously fail to interrogate and examine the systemic inequalities that exist within their institutions.

This failure to consider how the institutional structures themselves reinforce colonial relations of power and privilege is further compounded by a lack of understanding around the complexity of Indigenous identities within colonial institutions. Alfred and Cornthassle (2005) state that Indigenous identity is “constructed, shaped and lived in the politicized context of contemporary colonialism” (p. 597) and Palmater (2013) writes about the ways Indigenous identity is defined in conjunction with the attempt to legislate who is or is not Indigenous through the Indian Act and the division of individuals into status or non-status. Indigenous students are the only students attending higher education who may have a legislatively defined identity and they are usually required to self-identify as Indigenous to access specialized student services. Higher education institutions demonstrate little appreciation for the multiple political layers associated with Indigenous identity and the complexities of Indigenous and colonial relations.

According to Deer (2011), how elementary and secondary schools understand and teach about Canadian identity further promotes dominant post-colonial influences that can interfere with Indigenous identity and Indigenous students’ self-concept. This impacts higher education contexts as mainstream students arrive with limited ability to question these post-colonial understandings of Canadian identity and an investment in understanding a particular view of Canada that is rarely about to accommodate the tangled colonial history that has coloured relationships between Canada and Indigenous peoples. In the classroom, this expresses itself as a failure to understand the experiences of Indigenous students and as a force that also continues to perpetuate systemic inequalities as the norm.

Over the past decade, there has been a push to make higher education campuses more welcoming for Indigenous students. While initiatives to ‘indigenize’ the academy are often well intentioned, those putting the initiatives in place do not always mindfully and respectfully consider the implications of their initiatives.

Pidgeon (under review) points to higher education initiatives related to space and the display of Indigenous as an example of such initiatives. The setting aside of spaces for Indigenous ceremonies and the display of Indigenous art are important steps but she stresses that such initiatives need to be done mindfully and respectfully so that the initiative both recognizes and values Indigenous peoples while also working to educate mainstream individuals and combat racism. These initiatives should not be undertaken without an understanding of the complex histories and the associated wounds that have been experienced by

Indigenous students and communities through there both forcible and voluntary involvement with Canadian education systems. Thought must also be given to a consideration of whether or not the initiative may be a form of appropriation or if it is a genuine respectful act.

On an individual level, non-Indigenous students, faculty, staff and administrators have a choice in how they contribute to the environment and climate experienced by Indigenous students in higher education. They can choose to close their eyes to uncomfortable realities and continue on perpetuating them or they can chose to educate themselves and resist systemic inequalities. Using one's voice can be as simple as speaking up when an inequality is being perpetuated or challenging a policy that negates other people's experiences or lived realities. It can be exposing others to knowledge they may not be aware of or supporting someone when that person's viewpoint is being shut down as invalid or irrelevant. Sometimes it can be listening to another perspective and being open to being challenged and educated about how your own actions or lack of action may have reinforced inequalities or alienated Indigenous individuals. Such actions can contribute to the creation of educational settings in which Indigenous students and other Indigenous individuals feel welcome and accepted. It is important work that leads to opening up important spaces to talk about ways of moving forward together towards positive change that does not reproduce or perpetuate systems of inequality.

Another way of addressing inequality and assisting Indigenous students in navigating the challenging climates within higher educational contexts is found in the support

offered by specialized student services. As Pidgeon will discuss, Indigenous student focuses services has a history on higher education campuses an the wholistic approach has been the most successful. Indigenous student services is one of many important pieces in shifting the contexts and climates within higher education such that lived realities of Indigenous students are included and welcome. ■

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The relationship between policy and Indigenous Education in Canada

Michelle Pidgeon (SFU), Dawn Zinga (Brock) and Sandra Styres (OISE)

The relationship¹ between policy and Indigenous² education in Canada has been contentious to say the least and one that has been predominately dictated by the Crown's relationship to Canada's first peoples³. Initially through the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*⁴, and then later the *Indian Act 1876*⁵, Aboriginal K-12 education is a federal responsibility while constitutionally, education for non-Aboriginal peoples is a provincial oversight⁶.

From a decolonizing perspective, respecting the diversity of over 60 different Indigenous nations⁷, which represent as many cultures and languages is critical to counter the colonially imposed government defined parameters and terms⁸. This acknowledgement of diversity of nations is critical to shifting the policy discourses that aim to see Aboriginal peoples as homogenous to one that speaks to diversity as empowering Aboriginal nations' self-determination.

During the 1800s to 1950s, Aboriginal education had the purpose of assimilating Aboriginal peoples into society. Removing the Indian from the child was the intentional purpose of schooling, and main directive of Residential schools⁹. Education at this time had little focus on post-secondary aspirations or attainment outside of the preparation of Indigenous peoples to do low skilled jobs (e.g., housekeeper, farmer) (Battiste & Barman, 1995; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

(TRC), 2015b)¹⁰. The federal and provincial policies remained essentially unchanged until the later part of the 50s and into the 1960s, when more Aboriginal communities and organizations (e.g., the National Indian Brotherhood, now the Assembly of First Nations) became influential across several areas including education, policy, and legal advocacy. This leadership and advocacy signaled that important political, social, and cultural change was coming for Indigenous peoples.

For example, in 1969, the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chrétien, presented *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*, which aimed to set out a new relationship between Aboriginal nations and the federal government (Chrétien, 1969). The challenge was that this document did not include Indigenous perspectives on their own futures; in response the National Indian Brotherhood released the document entitled *Indian Control over Indian Education* to outline an Indigenous vision for education of their peoples: parental responsibility; programs, curriculum, and values; teachers and counselors; facilities and services; and research (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972; Pidgeon, Muñoz, Kirkness, & Archibald, 2013). The National Indian Brotherhood (1972) clearly stated, "We want education to give our children the knowledge to understand and be proud of themselves and the knowledge to understand the world around them" (p.1). This position has not changed since the 1970s; in a recent statement regarding the constitutional

right of Indigenous peoples to education across the life span, the Assembly of First Nations (2012) stated:

Section 35 (1) of the Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes Aboriginal and Treaty rights and affirms First Nations inherent right to self-government including the creation of laws and systems for the provision of lifelong learning for First Nations populations. First Nations expect the Crown, not only to recognize their jurisdiction to lifelong learning, but also to “fulfill their Constitutional, Treaty and international obligations to First Nations peoples by supporting the design and implementation of First Nations comprehensive learning systems with adequate and sustainable resourcing” (p. 5).

These philosophical differences on the responsibility of education and the purpose of education continued to influence how Aboriginal education was supported and experienced within the K-12 system. Given the disparities in health, education, and other social indicators between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) (1996) was established to better understand Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal historical and contemporary relations through national consultation and research¹¹. The RCAP report dedicates one entire volume to the educational experiences of Canada’s First Nations, from assimilationist policies and practices (e.g., residential schools), the Aboriginal post-secondary funding program and the impacts that such limited funding opportunities have had on post-secondary educational attainment, and the establishment of specific Aboriginal programs, services, and even institutions (Fisher et al., 2006; RCAP, 1996). And now, we see the recommendations from the Truth and

Reconciliation (TRC) (2015) reports, resonating familiarity with RCAP (1996) recommendations and clearly implicating the Canadian educational system in failing Aboriginal children, and the rest of Canada in its continued apathy towards Aboriginal peoples in this country.

Moving Forward... Statistics and research reports continue to demonstrate that the educational system’s fractures are still not all healed. There is still much work to be done at the policy and practice levels to create a higher education system that supports Indigenous learners and their communities with respectful, relevant, reciprocal, and responsible education (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). As a society we are still dealing with: the educational attainment gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples (White, Beavon, Peters, & Spence, 2009); the intergenerational trauma of residential schools; systemic, overt, and covert forms of racism in educational policies and practices (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996); and chronic underfunding at the K-12 and PSE systems for infrastructure, positions, and scholarships (Howe, 2004; Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2004; Usher, 2009).

There has been a steady increase in the high school completion rates of Aboriginal youth, with more and more being “post-secondary ready” – i.e., prepared to enter college or university upon graduation. The challenge is that within this growth, there is clear differentiation of completion rates between on- and off-reserve schools, with on-reserve high school completion rates still remaining low across each province and territory (Richards, 2013). High school completion rates impact readiness of this group to enter into university or college; and for the non-completers it directly influences when they may choose to pursue further education (e.g., waiting



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until they are older than 21 to enter as mature students)¹². One must also consider the connection between the K-12 to higher education, and how Aboriginal students are being prepared to be ready for higher education. Within the K-12 system across the country there have been concerted efforts to make K-12 a better place for Aboriginal students, with the aim of increasing high school graduation rates. For example, British Columbia's Ministry of Education has been articulating policies with its school districts

and Aboriginal communities called "Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements"¹³ yet only 2 of the over 50 agreements specifically mention post-secondary education (Kitchenham, Fraser, Pidgeon, & Ragoonaden, 2016). Approaching support services from a strengths- or gifts-based approach honors the cultural integrity of the Indigenous student (Pidgeon, 2016; Pidgeon, Archibald, & Hawkey, 2014). Within this discussion there is recognition that barriers exist, whether structural, social, economic, etc., that hinder Aboriginal student success.

As a direct result of assimilationist policies and ongoing colonial practices there are systemic problems within the Canadian education systems and society. There is still much work to be done to have policies and practices that are inclusive and respectful of Indigeneity. There are many

Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples working to make systemic changes across our educational system. The work will not be in vane. It will take time, and it will be an ongoing process, and it is time for all of us to further support Indigenous empowerment and self-determination. ■

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¹ In the founding of Canada as a British Colony, Aboriginal peoples residing in what is now Canada were not seen as equal nations. Instead, the land was seen by Europeans as a terra nullius (nobody's land) and free for the taking. Over time, this relationship between European settlers and documents such as the Royal Proclamation of 1783 and the Indian Act 1876 (and its subsequent amendments which are binding to this day), set out the relationship between the Crown and Aboriginal peoples. The term "unceded territories" acknowledges the fact that the land that is known as Canada was occupied prior to colonization and Aboriginal peoples did not relinquish their rights to these lands through treaty or other means. Aboriginal peoples did not legally give up their territories and lands; they were dislocated from their lands through policy and practices of colonization in what we now refer to as Canada. (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996) (also see: <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100013778/1100100013779>)

² Indigenous peoples, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit, are the fastest growing population in Canada, according to Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013). In the 2011 National Household Survey (NHS) there are 1,400,685 people self-identified as having an Aboriginal identity, representing 4.3% of the total Canadian population, an increase from 3.8% in the 2006 Census (Statistics Canada, 2013).

³ The terms Indigenous and Aboriginal interchangeably to refer, broadly, to the first peoples of Canada (formerly

referred to as "Indians"), including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples and, where appropriate, more specific terms that speak to how groups self-identify (e.g., Mi'kmaq, Cree, Sto'lo, Inuit)

⁴ For more information on the Royal Proclamation see <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1370355181092/1370355203645>

⁵ For more information on the Indian Act see <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/i-5/>

⁶ It is important to acknowledge that the Crown does not view Aboriginal higher education is not seen as a legal responsibility, but Aboriginal peoples saw their early negotiations with the Crown to include education across the life-span from early childhood to post-graduate education (RCAP, 1996; Stonechild, 2006).

⁷ There are others who do not fit neatly into one of the three recognized groups of Indigenous people. There are those who come to learn of their Aboriginal ancestry later in life – e.g., as a result of being adopted out into non-Aboriginal families, particularly during "the 60s scoop," a period when Aboriginal children were taken into foster care and adopted out (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996). This could also result from a family's decisions to not disclose their Aboriginal identities to their descendants. The history of colonization, government policy, and politics regarding who is defined as Indigenous and by whom (e.g., community, federal government) has had profound impacts on Indigenous individuals, families, communities, and nations that continue across society today (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015a, 2015b).

⁸ Colonially imposed terms include is "First Nations," which results from the Indian Act of 1876, while amended over time, its defined power of relationship of the Crown over Aboriginal education has remained essentially unchanged. The Métis are a unique cultural group who have First Nations and European ancestry, their own language and cultural practices, and are recognized as one of three Aboriginal groups within Canada in the 1982 Canadian

Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The third group, the Inuit, are Indigenous peoples who live in the Arctic and northern regions of Canada (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), 1996).

⁹ Residential School. Residential schools (e.g., boarding schools) and Indian day schools were primarily operated from the early 1800s to 1996 across Canada by various religious orders with the aim of assimilation and removing the “Indian” from the child (e.g., no Aboriginal language or cultural practices were allowed). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2010-2015) sought to witness and document the intergenerational trauma from residential schools. It had the mandate to learn the truth about what happened in the residential schools and to inform all Canadians about what happened in the schools. ... Reconciliation is an ongoing individual and collective process, and will require commitment from all those affected including First Nations, Inuit and Métis former Indian Residential School (IRS) students, their families, communities, religious entities, former school employees, government and the people of Canada. (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), para. 3-4).

This commission documented the stories of survivors of residential schools, hearing more than 6,750 testimonies and collecting documents, pictures, and other artifacts along the way. The TRC final reports spanning 10 volumes documenting the notable atrocities such as physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, death in care, and the intergenerational trauma that resulted from children being taken away from their families, their cultures, and their homes (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015a). The Calls to Action speaks directly to the responsibility that education has in reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015b).

¹⁰ Aboriginal persons who did pursue their university degrees (or became ministers of religion, thus educated) and were under the jurisdiction of the Indian Act of 1876, lost their federal status as First Nations persons, which had intergenerational repercussions for their descendants (Furi & Wherrett, 1996). Amendments to the Indian Act in 1951 and Bill C-31 in 1985 sought to rectify such “acts” that

resulted in disenfranchisement and to align the outdated policy with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms:

The amendments were intended to remove discrimination, restore status and membership rights, and increase control by bands over their affairs. The federal government continues to maintain control over who is registered as an Indian and the rights that flow from registration. The bill represented a compromise between the positions of Aboriginal women and non-status Indian groups, and the national status Indian organization, the AFN. (Furi & Wherrett, 1996, p.4)

However, the legacy of disenfranchisement still has lasting impact of many Indigenous families who were directly affected by these policies.

¹¹ <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/royal-commission-on-aboriginal-peoples/>

¹² The common conception is a mature learner is someone who is over 21 years of age. See Ryerson, University of Western Ontario, and Memorial University for examples:

<http://www.ryerson.ca/undergraduate/admission/admissions/mature.html>;

http://welcome.uwo.ca/admissions/admission_requirements/mature_and_senior_applicants.html;

<http://www.mun.ca/regoff/calendar/sectionNo=REGS-0289>. Other institutions, like Simon Fraser University, see mature learners as 23 or older, e.g., <https://www.sfu.ca/students/admission-requirements/profile-mature.html>

¹³ See <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/agreements/> for more information about the AEEA in British Columbia.

Wholistic Models of Success of Indigenous Student Services: A home away from home

Michelle Pidgeon, Simon Fraser University

Canada has approximately 1.3 million people who self-identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (Statistics Canada, 2015). Within our public universities and colleges, approximately 3% of the total student population is Aboriginal. However, there is variation by province, particularly due to Aboriginal population density, migration, and institutional type. For example, geographic areas with higher number of Aboriginal peoples tend to also influence institutional Aboriginal student populations (e.g., the University of Northern British Columbia has an Indigenous student population of approximately 10%) and Indigenous specific institutions tend to have predominately Aboriginal students (e.g., over 90%).

Historically, Aboriginal post-secondary participation was limited due to assimilationist policies and practices, such as Residential schools, which prepared children for work rather than higher education and the Indian Act, which removed status from those First Nations who chose to attend university. This issue is complex and also influenced by the lack of relevant programs, services, and financial support resulted in little to no university or college attainment prior to the 1960s (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Stonechild, 2006). There were some major national events that occurred in the 1950s-1960s that changed this history. The first was the organization of

Aboriginal peoples formally speaking back to federal government policies and practices (e.g., National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), the establishment of the Aboriginal Post-Secondary Program by the federal government (Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2006), and more Aboriginal students completing high school ready to enter higher education. With these, and other societal shifts, post-secondary institutions began providing culturally relevant academic programs (such as Native Teacher Education and Native Studies). In providing access to these programs, Aboriginal communities, governments, along with universities and colleges recognized that Aboriginal learners also required support in their transition to and support in staying on their academic journeys, which led to the establishment of Native Student Services, which is more commonly referred to today as Aboriginal Student Services or Indigenous Student Services.

In Canada, the first of these culturally relevant wholistic support services to Indigenous students were established in the late 1960s by the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary, two institutions who lead the way for developing culturally relevant academic programming (Pidgeon & Hardy Cox, 2005). With provincial government support through grants aimed to support the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal

students (e.g., BC Provincial Advisory Committee, 1990) the field developed further in the 1990s across the country. To date approximately 95% of all Canadian public universities and colleges have some form of Aboriginal student services.

Wholistic service provision is a model that is based on Indigenous cultural frameworks that are informed by the local Aboriginal nations on whose territories the institution resides (e.g., Figure 1). Wholistic means that the student's emotional, cultural, physical, and intellectual needs are addressed through relationships and connections to their family, community (on-campus and off-campus), local community and nation and beyond (Pidgeon, 2005, 2016). The 4Rs surrounding these realms speak to Indigenous understandings of what university and colleges should be doing to support Indigenous student success (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). For example, establishing relevant programs and services, respecting Indigenous knowledges, maintaining reciprocal relationships, and taking responsibility for the work to be done to support Indigenous students and their communities.

To address the physical realms, students are often provided a physical space on campus that may be a separate building or a unit of offices designated for Aboriginal Student Services. These spaces often include a lounge, study rooms, computer room, office and meeting space, kitchen, and cultural ceremony space. Physical needs of the students include financial support, housing, and day care which are supported through workshops, information sessions, referrals, and/or information is accessible online. Also important is physical wellbeing and with a kitchen students can prepare individual or group meals (e.g., a community soup and bannock day), workshops are held on healthy eating and exercise, and often they will have



Figure 1: Wholistic Indigenous Framework

fundraisers to support the work of the Aboriginal Student Association on campus.

Intellectual realms are also supported through provision of silent study spaces and computer rooms where students can go to do their studies. Intellectual supports include but are not limited to through peer-tutoring programs and Elders, who the students can talk with for support. The value of community in supporting the intellectual realm cannot be undervalued for students receive and provide encouragement and support to each other.

The cultural realm must be discussed in relation to the over 60 different Aboriginal groups in Canada and a pan-Indian approach to cultural ceremonies is highly inappropriate. Many of our students come to higher education with a strong sense of who they are culturally having been raised within their culture, speaking the language, tending to traditions, and attending cultural events and ceremonies. However, others come to university or college exploring and seeking a better understanding of who they are as Indigenous peoples. They may have been disconnected from their culture do to the colonial assimilative practices (e.g., residential school, adoption, foster care) or

their families have not (due to complex reasons) not continued to pass on the knowledge and teachings of their Aboriginal ancestors. The range of who is Indigenous on our campuses is vast, especially when we think of internationalization and the mobility of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, cultural practices and ceremonies within our campuses needs to be respectful of that diversity, honour the nations on which they reside, and support students in their own cultural integrity, where ever they maybe in that journey.

Ceremonies and Elders also are a vital component of the wholistic model for supporting Indigenous student success. Recognizing the vast scope and depth of cultural ceremonies, it is important to understand the territory and nation(s) cultural practices on which the university or college resides. Ensuring the proper cultural protocols are done regarding ceremonies includes following traditional teachings and also working within an institutional space that has fire regulations and other policies. Cultural ceremonies such as sweat lodge and smudging on campus have resulted in Aboriginal student services staff working with campus enforcement and local fire departments to have a protocol for policies and procedures that support these cultural events on campus. Such initiatives have further developed relationships and understanding across campuses regarding Indigenous culture and practices.

Therefore, Aboriginal Student Services is not just a physical space but for many Aboriginal students, these centres are “homes way from home,” where they can also get support for their emotional realm from peers, Elders, and a sense of connection and community. Emotional supports also include Aboriginal counsellors and/or referrals to on-campus counselling or community counselling. Many Centres will do wellness workshops and ceremonies

supporting student’s mental and emotional health.

The 4Rs speaks to the work done within Aboriginal student services to support Indigenous student success and also provide insight into the relationship building, as the previous example demonstrated, that occurs with academic and student affairs units outside of Aboriginal student services. Aboriginal student service professionals are the site of knowledge on most campuses for Indigeneity and are often consulted or sought out to provide information sessions or sit on committees that may have some connection to Aboriginal issues. They are also the “watch dogs” on campus where they are mindful of broader campus initiatives, policies, programs, and events that may be neglectful of the Indigenous perspective and they have to speak up for Indigenous peoples in these spaces (Pidgeon, 2014).

Indigenous student services provide a model for supporting Indigenous learners’ success that is grounded in culture, relationships, respect, and relevance (Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013). Understanding that Indigenous student success is not only to be measured by institutional norms such as GPA and completion rates is key (HeavyRunner & DeCelles, 2002; Pidgeon, 2008). For many Indigenous students, simply attending one course is a success. For others it means achieving their goals (e.g., going to graduate school) and giving back to their community. For others it is about either learning about, maintaining, and/or being empowered in who they are as Indigenous peoples while they pursue their education. Therefore, Indigenous student success can be understood through a wholistic framework, such as in Figure 1, whereby the interconnections of the physical, emotional, cultural, and intellectual are intertwined with the individual, community,

and nation. Success is complex and each individual's journey is somewhat unique. This framework of understanding success and service provision allows that student to see themselves reflected in the supports and services provided by Indigenous student services, and ideally across the institution.

There has been much change in the academic climate for Indigenous peoples, however, much more work has to be done if we are to see any gains in the educational disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. As a nation, we are working together towards reconciliation (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), 2015). Within higher education the conversations of Indigeneity, Decolonization, and now Reconciliation are in the minds and hearts of many. Aboriginal student services will play a vital role in supporting campuses becoming more hospitable to Indigenous students and be a bridge for reconciliation for others on campus. It is important to be mindful that reconciliation does not mean the responsibility of this work lies solely with Indigenous peoples on our campuses, it does mean that all of us are responsible for the work of better understanding and supporting Indigeneity and in this case, Indigenous student success. ■

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An education for every child

The Ministry for Education in Ontario answers Adjacent Government's questions on the importance of every child in Canada benefiting from world class education...

Education in any country is important and it's key that every child has the chance to achieve their full potential. In Canada, it is no different and the Ministry of Education in the province of Ontario strives to provide education and support to pupils of all communities. Here they outline to Adjacent Government their commitment to every child in the province and steps that have been taken to reach these goals.

How important is it for each child in Ontario to benefit from education?

Vibrant communities and a prosperous society are built on the foundation of a strong education system, and the task of the government is to help the province of Ontario's 2 million students reach their full potential.

In 2014, the Ontario government launched [Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario](#). Its 4 goals are: Ensuring Equity, Promoting Well-being, Enhancing Public Confidence and Achieving Excellence. The vision reaffirms the province's commitment to helping all learners in the province's education system develop the knowledge, skills and characteristics that will lead them to become personally successful, economically productive and actively engaged citizens.

Ontario's publicly funded education system partners with parents, guardians and communities to help develop successful graduates. With a provincial five-year graduation rate of 85.5% – we now have 190,000 additional students who have graduated since 2004 – students who would not have done so had the rate remained at the 2004 level.

How does Ontario's Ministry of Education support schools and pupils in First Nations?

In keeping with our Aboriginal Education Strategy, the ministry continues to focus on reaching 2 primary objectives: improving student achievement and well-being among First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, and closing the achievement gap between Indigenous students and all other students in Ontario.

The government is also committed to continuing to build positive relationships with Ontario First Nations and working in a spirit of mutual respect through all interactions. Although the Ministry of Education does not provide direct funding for the operation of First Nation schools, the ministry works in partnership with First Nations and the federal government to achieve the goal of the Aboriginal Education Strategy.

“Ontario’s investments in its publicly funded education system are paying dividends. The province’s strong graduation rate and international test scores confirm our success. But we are not complacent; we know that more work needs to be done to continue improving Ontario’s system and help every student reach their full potential.”

We know that strong partnerships between the ministry, school boards, schools, educators, families, students and community organisations are essential in our work. To reach our goals, we have taken important steps in making system-wide changes

including targeted funding, professional development and the integration of First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives into the curriculum.

How important is it for all young Canadians to understand Indigenous histories and culture?

All students, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are enriched by learning about the histories, cultures and perspectives of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples in Canada. Also, students are more engaged in their learning when they see their own communities and cultures reflected in the curriculum.



Since 2003, the Ontario Ministry of Education has engaged a broad range of Indigenous stakeholders and academic experts during the curriculum review process to ensure that the curriculum is more inclusive of First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, contributions and perspectives.

Thanks to the contributions of our First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners, every Ontario student is building a greater awareness and understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures and perspectives. The teaching of the histories, culture and perspectives of Indigenous people – including residential schools – is now a mandatory part of the teacher training curriculum.

In 2014, Ontario sent First Nations and Treaties maps to every elementary and secondary school in the province to help raise awareness about treaties. These maps and the accompanying teaching resources are helping students to learn about the significance of the treaties and the shared history of First Nations and non-Indigenous Ontarians. Our province has designated the first week of November as [Treaties Recognition Week](#) to promote public education and awareness about treaties and treaty relationships.

How can this help to develop greater community throughout the country?

Ontario's diversity is one of the province's greatest assets. Embracing this diversity and moving towards inclusivity and respect will help us reach our goal of making Ontario's education system the most equitable in the world. Everyone in our publicly funded education system –



regardless of background or personal circumstances – must feel engaged and included.

How important is integration in schools in order to bring together different communities?

Ontario schools need to be places where everyone can succeed in a culture of learning and high expectations. The government's work over the past decade has been focused on helping all children and youth reach their full potential by giving them the tools to help overcome obstacles. We are seeing the results, which includes a culture shift in schools that recognises diversity as a contributor to success, and not a barrier. The fundamental

principle driving this work is that every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors.

“We know that strong partnerships between the ministry, school boards, schools, educators, families, students and community organisations are essential in our work. To reach our goals, we have taken important steps in making system-wide changes including targeted funding, professional development and the integration of First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives into the curriculum.”

How does the ministry support Achieving Excellence throughout Ontario with investments such as the recent \$7M for First Nations Métis and Inuit students?

Ontario’s Aboriginal Education Strategy sets the foundation for improving achievement among Aboriginal students in provincially funded schools and supports life-long learning beginning in the early years and continuing through postsecondary, training or workplace opportunities. In 2016-17, Ontario’s targeted investments for Indigenous education will be more than \$71mn.

Some of the more recent investments will help provide all school boards with a new senior-level position dedicated to supporting First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education initiatives. This initiative clearly demonstrates Ontario’s support for the

education recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In addition, this new position will promote a greater awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives and contributions among all students, while developing greater community and family engagement.

Ontario’s support for Indigenous students is part of the province’s overall annual education budget, which is estimated to be \$22.9bn for 2016-17.

How can investments such as this help to deliver world class education for all?

Ontario’s investments in its publicly funded education system are paying dividends. The province’s strong graduation rate and international test scores confirm our success. But we are not complacent; we know that more work needs to be done to continue improving Ontario’s system and help every student reach their full potential. Equity remains a key goal of our education system, and through our many investments in education, we are committed to helping all of our students achieve success in school and beyond.



Ministry of Education
Government of Ontario
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FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Dr. Dawn Zinga
Associate Professor and Chair
Department of Child and Youth Studies
Brock University

dzinga@brocku.ca

Tel: +1 905 688 5550, ext. 3152

Dr. Michelle Pidgeon
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
Simon Fraser University

michelle_pidgeon@sfu.ca

Tel: +1 778 782 8609

Dr. Sandra Styres
Adjunct Professor
Department of Child and Youth Studies
Brock University

**Assistant Professor of Language, Literacy
and Curriculum in Aboriginal Education**
Department of Curriculum,
Teaching & Learning
OISE/University of Toronto

sandra.styres@utoronto.ca

www.brocku.ca

www.sfu.ca

www.oise.utoronto.ca