First Nations Post-Secondary Education in Western Canada: Obligations, Barriers, and Opportunities

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Abstract: From 1871 to 1921 First Nations Chiefs and Headmen across the prairies agreed to a series of treaties with the Crown's Treaty Commissioners. The Numbered Treaties established obligations for each party – First Nations agreed to share their land with the new comers in exchange for commitments and services. One such service was the delivery of western education, which the Crown assured First Nations would not "deter" from their own Indigenous education and would enable First Nations people to "live and prosper and provide" (Morris, 1880/1991, p. 28). Today, there is a significant disparity in educational attainment between First Nations people and Canadians in general. This paper gives focus to the treaty right to education, the barriers and opportunities First Nations peoples face in pursuing a post-secondary education, and the initiatives undertaken by various post-secondary institutions to address the achievement gap.

In 2001, the International Development Research Centre published *The Wellbeing of Nations a Country by Country Index of Quality of Life and the Environment (Index)*: within this ranking of nations, Canada placed 7th out of 180 countries in relation to the quality of life and the environment within the five dimensions relating to health and population –wealth, knowledge and culture, community, and equity (p. 278). Canadians enjoyed longer life spans, better health, "better scores for… freedom and governance" (p. 117) and a "high standard of living" (p. 17) when compared with populations in the 180 nations. The *Index* noted that with the inclusion of equity – defined as "distribution of benefits & burdens between males & females & among households, ethnic groups, & other social divisions" (p. 278) – Canada's ranking drops from good to fair (p. 17). The inequity relates specifically to the "unevenly distributed" wellbeing between Canadians and Aboriginal[1] peoples, specifically First Nations[2] peoples. Within this context, the Assembly of First Nations stated that "First Nations living conditions or quality of life ranks 63rd, or amongst Third World conditions" and First Nations people "die earlier than other Canadians…face increased rates of suicide, diabetes, tuberculosis, and HIV/AIDS;…face a crisis in housing and living conditions;….lack jobs and economic opportunities" (AFN, 2008, pp. 1-3). Furthermore, First Nations people do not attain "education levels equal to other Canadians" (AFN, 2008, p. 2). Maual & Schabus (2005) referred to the "socio-economic marginalization of the Indigenous peoples in Canada as "the fourth world" inside the "first world"" (p. 223).

The division between First Nations peoples and Canadians in general is an historical one, evidenced in the policies and practices of colonialism, the history of contact and settler relationships, the Indian Act, and Canada's inability to honor pre- and post- Confederation treaty obligations. In 1969, then Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau in a speech in Vancouver stated, "I think Canadians are not proud about their past in the way in which they treated the Indian population….We have set the Indians apart as a race….They have been set apart in the relations with government and they have been set apart socially too" (Cummings & Mickenberg, 1970, p. 331).

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[1] Canada's Constitution Section 35 recognizes the "aboriginal peoples of Canada" which includes Indian, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

[2] From the 1970s onwards, the wording First Nations replaced the use of Indian and is today the preferred nomenclature though there is no legal definition for this term.

In 2012, the United Nations "slammed Canada for First Nations treatment" as members on the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination "questioned why headway has not been made in resolving the disparities between First Nations communities and the rest of the country. This problem should not continue the same way as it has in the past" (Gunn, 2012, p. 2). James Bartleman (2012), the first Aboriginal Lieutenant Governor of Ontario recently stated, "you have to provide justice to First Nations communities…There is no excuse in a country like Canada" (p.1).

Canada has taken steps to address inequalities between First Nation peoples and other Canadians such as in 2011 when First Nations people living on-reserve were brought within the sphere of the thirty-year-old Canadian Human Rights Act. This Act ensures equality of opportunity and freedom from discrimination for all Canadians. Similarly, the *United Nations Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples* which was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007 was finally endorsed by Canada in 2010. These initiatives along with Canada's apology in 2008 for the treatment of First Nations children in residential schools (Newfoundland and Labrador was not included in the apology since it did not join Confederation until 1949), and the gathering of First Nations representatives and the Crown in 2012 are important initial steps in building a better relationship between First Nations people, the Canadian government, and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

The purpose of this research paper is to give focus to post-secondary education as a vehicle for the attainment of individual and community goals, community self-sustainability, and self-determinations. Post-secondary education is set within the context of the Numbered Treaties – signed between 1871 and 1921 – and the federal government's responsibility for First Nations education and corresponding policy and financial support for post-secondary programming and funding for First Nations people. Historical inquiry and documentary analysis is utilized to investigate the past in order to establish the scope of western educational services committed to by the Crown during the Numbered Treaty negotiations; educational services provided by the federal government since Confederation in 1867; and the growing participation of First Nations people in tertiary education and the growth of First Nations post-secondary institutions.

The Numbered Treaties and education

Between 1871 and 1921, Canada on behalf of the Imperial Crown and First Nations from western Ontario to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains met at various locations to enter into treaty agreements. The meetings for each of the Numbered Treaties were about "the intention to create obligations" (Burrows & Rotman, 1998, p. 112) on behalf of both First Nations and the Crown. In entering into treaty "both parties recognized and affirmed one another's authority to enter into and make binding commitments in treaties" (p. 106). While each of the individual treaty negotiations was similar, "important matters" related to "Reserves, schools, [and] the amount of money gratuities and annuities made or secured to the Indians" were specific to each treaty (Indian Affairs, 1876, p. xi). All the Numbered Treaties refer specifically to the provision of western educational services which would not detract or "deter" from Indigenous educational practices or "interfere" with their daily life (Morris, 1880/199, p. 241). The Treaty Commissioners encouraged the First Nations people to learn from farming instructors, whose instructional services the Crown would provide, to till the land and farm and learn other skills and thus be able to "live and prosper and provide like the white man" for their families (Morris, 1880/1991, p. 28).

The Treaty Commissioners promised the Crown would "establish schools whenever any band asks for them" (p. 58). The treaty discussions related to each of the Numbered Treaties negotiations took place over days and weeks. None of the treaty discussions were limited to schools as sites of learning for children rather the treaty discussions referenced western learning for children, youth and adults. This life-long learning focus was within the scope of Indigenous education and western educational practices of educational endeavors for children and adults as a preparation for the changing economy. The Treaty Commissioners assured the First Nations people that educational services would be provided by the

Queen who was "always just and true" (Morris, 1880/1991, p. 94). Education was promised as an opportunity to learn new skills, to adapt to future economic trends and requirements "as long as the sun shines above and the water flows in the ocean" (p. 96). Asch (1997) argued that the Numbered Treaties resulted in the "successful negotiation of universal access to education for all Indigenous peoples without discrimination by age or sex" (p. 194) and reflected the Chiefs' and Elders' desire for their people to understand and "cope with the newcomers...and their way....[and] language" (pp. 194-195). Canadian courts in reference to matters related to specific treaty issues before them, have ruled that as in R. v. Battiste (1978), courts "must not assume that Her Majesty's [Treaty] Commissioners were attempting to trick or fool the Indians into signing an agreement under false pretenses" (Isaac, 1995, p. 102). Furthermore, in Claxton v. Saanichton Marina Ltd. (1989), the court ruled that "The treaty should be given a fair, large, and liberal construction in favour of the Indians" and that "Treaties must be construed, not according to the technical meaning of their words but in the sense that they would naturally be understood by the Indians" (p. 104).

In search of the Crown's educational commitment

Despite the Crown's treaty commitment to provide schools, education, and training through the Numbered Treaties, Canada's federal government left the provision of educational services to various religious/missionary groups. Together, religious organizations and First Nations community members built schools on reserves – sometimes receiving a contribution from the federal government after the school was built and had been in operation for a year. The educational policy of the federal government, however, determined the types of schools constructed on the reserve. Initially supporting the establishment and operation of day schools, following the 1879 review of Industrial Schools in the United States, Canada implemented a policy of residential schooling for First Nations children and youth. Particularly in western Canada, day schools were closed and replaced with residential schools. The latter were purported to provide basic education and skill training for future employment opportunities.

Indian Act

In 1876, the Canadian Parliament "consolidated the laws respecting Indians" (Venne, 1981, p. 24) and enacted The Indian Act and subsequently established a Department of Indian Affairs led by the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs or Minister. The scope of the Indian Act encompassed matters related to "the control and management of the reserves, lands, moneys, and property of Indians in Canada" including defining who was an Indian, marriages, deaths, schools, farming, employment, etc (p. 24). While the Indian Act has been amended from time to time, the Act is still in effect today and has far reaching consequences for the daily lives of First Nations people.

Education & Enfranchisement

The Indian Act determined who was and was not legally identified by the Indian Act as an Indian and also used education (among other factors) to determine who was not an Indian within the meaning of the Indian Act. Thus the Indian Act 1876 Section 86 (1) stated:

> Any Indian who may be admitted to the degree of Doctor of Medicine, or to any other degree by any University of Learning, or who may be admitted in any Province of the Dominion to practice law either as an Advocate or as a Barrister or Counsellor (sic) or Solicitor or Attorney or to be a Notary Public, or who may enter Holy Orders or who may be licensed by any denomination of Christians as a Minister of the Gospel, shall *ipso* facto become and be enfranchised (Venne, 1981, 46).

Thus within the authority of the Indian Act, once a First Nations person pursued western education he or she was declared by the Canadian government to no longer be a First Nations person within the context of the Indian Act. While Canada's government did not always implement its own legislation, some individuals nevertheless were enfranchised as a result of pursuing post-secondary education. The attainment of education was thus perceived or connected to losing one's identity and rights as an Indigenous person. With major revisions to the Indian Act in 1951, the link between education and enfranchisement was removed.

Tertiary Education: First Nations Students in the Twentieth Century

Prior to Confederation in 1867 the British colonial government and the individual colonial governments and subsequently the Canadian government provided funding to individual First Nations students to pursue post-secondary educational opportunities in a variety of programs from agricultural and industrial skill training to nursing, education, and other university and professional schooling in post-secondary institutions across Canada. In 1929, Indian Affairs *Annual Report* to Parliament noted that "the program of free education is now extended to all Indians of Canada. The expenditure for Indian education for the fiscal year ended March 31, 1929, amounted to $2,215,411.98" (p. 18). This amount included costs for "Indian young men and women attending collegiate, business schools, colleges, and universities" (p. 12). While the 110 students represented a national figure, nevertheless, the Crown clearly carried out its own obligation to provide educational services which included funding for post-secondary students. Canada re-enforced its commitment to treaty responsibility for education and stated, "In future the education [pertaining to post-secondary education] of these Indians shall be carried on without cost to them, thus completing a system of free education to all the Indian wards of the Crown in Canada" (p. 14). Canada continued to provide tuition and allowances to all First Nations students who were accepted into tertiary educational institutions across Canada.

In 1968, Canada formalized its levels of funding and adopted a national program entitled *Post-Secondary Education Assistance*. Through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Canada[3] administered the program and all students who were accepted and enrolled in post-secondary institutions were funded until graduation. Over the next four decades, Indian Affairs made gradual changes to the post-secondary funding program, including narrowing the definition of post-secondary education so that it applied only to university based programming (degree programs) and no longer funded occupational /training skills education offered in community colleges or technical institutes. In 1996, Canada also "capped" the post- secondary budget at 2% growth each year, which drastically affected First Nations people at a time of a quickly growing population and a corresponding demand for tertiary education. This measure was undertaken by the federal government during a period of government austerity. The "capped" budget resulted in a "waiting list" of First Nations individuals who were accepted into but due to Canada's budget restrictions, did not receive funding from the federal government to pursue post-secondary studies.

Statistics: A widening divide

The 1996 financial 2% control on funding tertiary education for First Nations students is in effect today, despite knowledge of the growing Aboriginal population in Canada and the importance of tertiary education. Guppy & Davis (1998), drawing upon the 1991 Census of Canada which identified 19 ethnic groups and the prevalence of university degrees within these groups, noted that Aboriginal male and females between twenty-five and thirty-four years of age were ranked nineteenth when ethnic and age groups are compared (Table 4.8 and Table 4.9). In reference to university degree attainment, Guppy & Davis stated that not only were Aboriginal women and men well below the Canadian average, but that there was virtually no change among the groups at the bottom of the table. Furthermore, they argued that "the most entrenched inequities are experienced by First Nations peoples....while [they] have improved their educational level the rate of improvement is significantly behind all other groups in the country" (p.

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[3] In 2011, the Department's name was changed to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

1). Similarly, Canada's Auditor General recommended that "the Department [of Indian Affairs] needs to urgently define its own role and responsibilities to improve" educational outcomes for First Nations' peoples "numerous studies have stressed the importance and benefits of post-secondary education (2004, p. 2). The Assembly of First Nations (2011) noted that "61% of First Nations peoples on reserve...did not have a high school diploma, compared to 13% of the Canadian population. Only 4% of First Nations people....have a university degree, compared to 23% of the Canadian population" (p. 3). Helin & Snow (2010) in a draft document dated January 28, 2010 entitled *Free to Learn: Giving Aboriginal Youth Control over their post-secondary education*, noted that

> Aboriginal educational attainment is increasing, albeit slightly. Between 2001 and 2006, for example, the rate of Aboriginals with a university degree moved from six to eight percent [but the] Aboriginal [educational] attainment is increasing very slowly, at a much slower rate than non-Aboriginal Canadians. The gap between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals is growing (n.p.).

Barriers to Post-Secondary Education

In explaining the under-representation of Aboriginal students within Canadian post-secondary institutions a significant body of research has identified an array of barriers faced by Aboriginal learners which include historical, educational, socio-cultural, geographic, person/demographic, and economic challenges (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; Canadian Council on Learning, 2006; Malatest and Associates, 2004; Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen,2000). The legacy of colonial educational policies continues to negatively impact young Aboriginal people, even though few among the current university-age generation experienced residential schools personally (this inter-generational consequences of residential schooling is often referred to as residential school syndrome). While university education has been viewed by non-Aboriginal Canadians as a springboard to greater wealth and higher status, for generations of Aboriginal people western education was associated with loss of Indian status, the severing of ties with family and community, and assimilation into mainstream Canadian society. The legacy of mistrust lingers today since attending university still tends to sever young First Nations students from their communities as they travel to urban centres to attend university. First Nations students who complete their program of studies are more likely to seek opportunities elsewhere than to return to their home reserve communities. Not returning to one's home community also has the effect of limiting the number of visible role models to inspire other potential students to aspire to a post-secondary education (Canadian Council on Learning, 2006).

Educational disadvantage – almost half of the on-reserve First Nations population has not graduated from high school – constitutes another significant barrier to accessing post-secondary education. In many small northern and remote communities, the quality of local schools is uneven, resources are often scarce and many students do not have an adequate grounding in core subjects – English, Math, Sciences, or cyber literacy – nor do they have instruction in their Indigenous language. Additional to the difficulty in attaining subjects and marks for university entrance, the lack of support within the community for post-secondary education contrasts with the support and encouragement that many non-Aboriginal students take for granted. Rigid post-secondary entrance requirements for such programs as law, medicine, and engineering serve as further barriers for First Nations students. Consequently, enabling success at the secondary school level is a crucial first step toward improving access to post-secondary education for all Aboriginal peoples (Mendelson, 2006).

Despite recent efforts by a variety of Canadian post-secondary institutions, universities typically remain sites where First Nations students do not see their peoples, cultures, lived experiences, or epistemologies reflected or honored. Malatest (2004) argued:

> Almost all faculty are from different cultural and socio-economic groups than Aboriginal students. Most do not have any depth of understanding of Aboriginal culture, traditions and core

> values, neither do they recognize the diversity of Aboriginal communities or understand that not all Aboriginal students' needs are the same. There is little recognition and understanding of the different cognition and learning styles. (p. 16)

Few Aboriginal people are employed in support capacities at universities, even fewer are faculty members and fewer still hold senior high profile university administrative positions. This absence of a critical mass of Aboriginal faculty, staff, and administrators typically means that many of the things that can help to attract and retain Aboriginal students (Aboriginal expertise in academic areas; infusion of Aboriginal epistemology into the curriculum, role models, mentors , and advisors for Aboriginal students, and general equity) are also absent (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007). The competitive and individualistic ethos of most universities also contrasts with the more cooperative, consensual, and collectivist orientation of many First Nations communities. Compounding these difficulties is the pervasive racism, often subtle and covert, which exacerbates the challenges Aboriginal students face in an intimidating post-secondary environment.

Another barrier to education at all levels is language, specifically academic English and French. The history of colonization, residential schools, and federal government educational policy has privileged Standard English and marginalized the many Aboriginal languages spoken prior to contact. This has resulted in the demise of many Indigenous languages while others are threatened with extinction. While linguists have begun to recognize English language variants that have developed in Aboriginal communities as legitimate communicative forms, educational institutions have frequently dismissed these as broken English. Genee & Stigter (2010), in their research, focused on Blackfoot English and determined that "aspects of IE [Indigenous English] occurring in the speech of English-speaking Indigenous children are often one of the reasons for a diagnosis of language delay or impairment which then follows these children throughout their school careers" (p. 63). Sterzuk (2008, 2010) noted that these diagnoses lead educators to argue that Aboriginal students are language deficient and less capable of developing print literacy. These diagnoses contribute to the educational achievement gap and limit Aboriginal students' access to post-secondary institutions and programs.

The acquisition of academic or Standard English is not as straightforward as it may seem because the relationships of Aboriginal peoples to the English language is complex. Farr, Seloni & Song (2010) described English as "an alien, intrusive language – a tool for assimilation and colonization" (p. 88). The loss of language caused in large part by federal educational policy and the banning of speaking Indigenous languages in schools has resulted in generations who have lost their mother tongue or who have chosen not to speak it in order "to shield their own children from the perceived liabilities of speaking the mother tongue" (Farr et al, p. 77). Aboriginal Englishes are languages of community (Battiste, Kovach, & Balzer, 2010; Peltier, 2010) that function as "counter hegemonic discourses" (Sterzuk, 2010, p. 100) to the colonizers language. When educational institutions do not recognize the cultural validity of these variants, students are disadvantaged and further marginalized. Atleo & Fitznor (2010) described this "intercultural marginality [being caught between two languages and cultures] is typified by the experience of not feeling at home in any given situation. Aboriginal students often do not feel at home in formal educational experiences, and the outcome can be apparent lack of motivation to engage in learning" (p. 19). As post-secondary institutions come to recognize the legitimacy and richness of the language experiences of Aboriginal students and work with them to acquire competency in academic English without sacrificing their home variant, marginalization may decrease and retention rates increase.

Geography also constitutes a significant barrier for First Nations students' access and success at the post-secondary level. For First Nations students living in northern communities, attending a post-secondary institution entails relocating hundreds or thousands of miles, involving significant travel and accommodation costs, and often social isolation from family and community supports (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Exacerbating these challenges, First Nations students are more likely to be female, more likely to have children, tend to be older and suffer from higher rates of disabilities than the typical Canadian non-Aboriginal undergraduate student (Holmes, 2006). Pursuing full-time post-secondary studies is thus more difficult when combined with the added responsibility of caring for young children, and childcare costs. Rising tuition and other associated costs constitute growing barriers to all Canadians seeking access to post-secondary education, but are particularly problematic for First Nations students. Without appropriate financial aid or support, post-secondary education is beyond the reach of many students. Unfortunately, most financial aid or support that is available to First Nations students is limited as a result of the federal government's decision to cap funding allotments for First Nations students (as discussed earlier in this paper) and the support that is available to them is not adequate for their real-life financial needs (Bear Spirit Consulting, 2007; Malatest, 2004). Research suggests that after family considerations, inadequate finances constitute the greatest barrier to First Nations student access and success at the post-secondary level (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000).

Changing programs and delivery: Changing outcomes

For almost half a century, Aboriginal peoples have been the youngest and fastest growing segment of Canada's population and today comprise five per cent of the total national population. To address the educational needs of a growing population, Canadian post-secondary institutions are focusing on the needs of Aboriginal learners. Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen (2000) categorized these initiatives into three approaches: the add-on approach, the partnership approach, and the First Nations control approach. Variations of these initiatives have been implemented in Canada.

The add-on approach typically involves constructing differentiated access processes for Aboriginal students to existing programs; provision of additional supports for students once enrolled in these programs; and the implementation of culturally sensitive curricular and pedagogical approaches to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal students. The Indian Teacher Education Program (ITEP), established in 1973 within the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan, is one such program. ITEP supports a Bachelor of Education program for First Nations students. These degree granting programs are offered both on-site at the University of Saskatchewan campus and also off-campus within First Nations communities in the central and northern areas of Saskatchewan. After almost four decades of operation, ITEP has graduated over 2000 Bachelor of Education recipients many of whom are administrators and teachers in First Nations schools. The University of Saskatchewan also offers off-campus cohort Bachelor of Education and Master of Education programs in northern areas of the province and on various First Nations reserves to ameliorate the necessity to move from their communities to distant urban centers to attend post-secondary institutions. At the University of Saskatchewan Aboriginal students currently comprise 39% of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education degree and 12% of graduate students in a variety of graduate degree programs offered by the College of Education (Preston, 2012). The University of Regina, also located in Saskatchewan, offers both an Aboriginal Social Work Program and an Aboriginal Masters of Business Administration designed for Aboriginal students. Similarly, McGill University in the 1970s established a McGill Certificate of Native and Northern Education for Inuktitut speaking teachers, and since the 1980s McGill has offered the Eastern Artic Teacher Education Program (now the Nunavut Teacher Education Program) in northern communities. In 2007, Nunavut Artic College entered into an agreement with the University of Regina for the delivery of the NTEP program. Similar Aboriginal teacher education programs are offered in post-secondary institutions in Canada's provinces such as the University of Manitoba and Brandon University both located in Manitoba. Memorial University of Newfoundland has offered similar programs in the past and in 2014 will offer a community-based program in Labrador. A number of Ontario post-secondary institutions offer a variety of degrees which focus on programming specifically designed to meet the needs of Aboriginal students such as the ones offered at Lakehead University and at the University of Ottawa.

Unama'ki College at Cape Breton University (CBU)in Sydney, Nova Scotia, is a partnership between the Mi'kmaw communities and CBU designed to meet the needs of Mi'Kmaw students and other First Nations students and contribute to the educational goals set by Mi'Kmaw communities. Furthermore, the Department of Indigenous Studies at Unama'ki College is devoted to programs designed to introduce all Cape Breton University students to the regions rich Indigenous culture through programs such as Integrative Science. On Canada's west coast, the University of British Columbia established the First Nations Longhouse where Aboriginal students can study and learn in a surrounding that reflects Aboriginal traditions and cultures. The First Nations Longhouse brings together a wide variety of services: it houses the native Indian Teacher Education Program and the UBC First Nations Student Association, and also enables Aboriginal peoples to share their knowledge and culture with one another, with the University community, and with the wider community as a whole (First Nations House of Learning, 2009, p. 1).

The First Nations control approach began with the 1971 takeover of the Blue Quills Indian Residential School First Nations in central Alberta. The school initially known as Blue Quills Education Centre and today as Blue Quills First Nations College offers post-secondary courses and degree programs in a variety of academic areas. In 1976, the First Nations University of Canada was established through a federated partnership with the University of Regina. Its mandate is to "enhance the quality of life, and to preserve, protect and interpret the history, language, culture and artistic heritage of First Nations people" (First Nations University, 2012, p. 1). First Nations University of Canada "provides a unique opportunity to study in an environment that supports First Nations cultures, languages, and values….[and encourages] students to participate in and learn through ceremony with Elders as well as through classroom based on experience" (p. 1). While offering a variety of programming and degrees, it is a "unique Canadian institution that specializes in Indigenous Knowledge, and provides post-secondary education for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students" (p. 2). The university has over 800 full-time students and 3,000 alumni. While the institution has encountered a number of difficulties in the past, it is revitalizing its governance system to better serve the needs of its students.

Conclusion

In highlighting its collaborative program with Blue Quills First Nations College, the University of Alberta cited the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples: "it has been recognized for decades that having Aboriginal teachers in the classroom is the first line of change in education of Aboriginal children and youth" (p. 1). This was reiterated by the Minister of Advanced Education in British Columbia in announcing a new bursary program to support Aboriginal teacher education students:

> We need more Aboriginal teachers. They serve as positive role models and can make a difference in an Aboriginal student's success in Kindergarten to [grade] 12, making it more likely that they will go on to post-secondary education and training….Aboriginal people are a vital part of B.C.'s economic future and workforce. This fund will help train the teachers who will inspire tomorrow's Aboriginal students to excel, building stronger communities and creating new opportunities. (Ministry of Advanced Education, 2012)

Post-secondary institutions in Canada over the last decade have given particular emphasis to changing both their delivery modes and program content. The 2009 Report of the Presidential Task Force on Aboriginal Initiatives, Memorial University of Newfoundland, identified 22 recommendations including "a more welcoming environment, peer support and adequate gathering space" for Aboriginal students" as well as "appropriate educational programming, including undergraduate and graduate options in Aboriginal studies and the professional training needed by Aboriginal communities" and a "new approach to teacher education" (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2009, np). Universities across Canada such as the University of Calgary and the University of Saskatchewan have undertaken concerted efforts to hire Aboriginal faculty members in order to attract and to support Aboriginal students in accomplishing their academic goals. In releasing its *First Nations University-Wide Strategic Plan* in 2008, Simon Fraser University (SFU) in British Columbia noted "the single most powerful predictor of educational quality for First Nations students is the incorporation of First Nations faculty and Indigenous knowledge perspectives into their educational experience". SFU embarked upon its 2008 plan to implement Indigenous knowledge perspectives in the curriculum, to increase the presence of First Nations faculty across all departments through targeted hiring practices, and to incorporate a strong First Nation student services model of success. This plan is based on eight areas: Academic program development; student recruitment; support and retention; liaison and outreach to First Nations peoples and communities; international engagement; Indigenous knowledge and resource development; infrastructure; integration and leadership development (Simon Fraser University, 2012, p. 1).

Decolonizing Canada's post-secondary institutions is an on-going process which begins to address some of the issues such as an academically, socially, and culturally balanced environment to address the barriers facing First Nations students aspiring to accomplish their educational goals. The government of Canada must not shake off or minimize its obligation for post-secondary education it entered into when agreeing to the Numbered Treaties with First Nations Chiefs and Headmen in 1871-1921. Canada must honor its treaty commitments within "the true spirit and original intent" of the numbered treaties (Treaty & Elders and Tribal Council, 1996). There is much work to be done in addressing and removing the educational barriers facing First Nations students. In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood noted:

> The time has come for a radical change in Indian education. Our aim is to make education relevant to the philosophy and needs of the Indian people. We want education to give our children a strong sense of identity, with confidence in their personal worth and ability. We believe in education: as a preparation for total living; a means of free choice of where to live and work; as a means of enabling us to participate fully in our own social, economic, political and education advancement (p. 3).

If Canada is to address the educational barriers of participation and achievement between First Nations peoples and all other Canadians and address the two silos identified in *The Wellbeing of Nations* (2001) ranking, then the "radical change" the National Indian Brotherhood called for in 1972 must be a multi-faced implementation plan in the twenty first century.

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