Aboriginal Transition Programs – Literature Review

Aboriginal Initiatives Office

Lakehead University

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"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world"

Nelson Mandela, 2003

Introduction

This Literature Review explores the wealth of studies and research across Canada and internationally to identify what students feel has best engaged them within post-secondary schooling and their personal academic experiences. We explore what has worked for transition programs in the past, what is currently being discovered about these important life passages, and what can be better utilized to ensure student success in the future. When examining literature from several countries, we recognized certain trends, issues and successes being consistently discussed, but felt the literature required further development to ensure relevant, successfully implemented, and fully accessible transition models (Archibald, Pidgeon & Hawkey, 2010; Gilmore, 2000; Hill-MacDonald, 2001; Hunt, Lalonde, & Rondeau, 2010; Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association and University of Victoria, 2011; Kutcher, 2014; Office of Indigenous Affairs, University of Victoria, 2011). This review seeks to better understand the critical pathways high school, non-traditional students, undergraduate and graduate students are most likely to tread towards success.

The academic community has begun to accept transition programs are a necessary and constructive way to help Indigenous students maintain or recover shaken identities and strengthen their relationships within a post-secondary institution (Shotton, et al: 2013). Indigenous and Aboriginal[1] students in Canada have continued to demonstrate consistently lower enrolment rates and higher dropout rates than non-Indigenous students not only in Canada, but Australia, New Zealand and Hawaii, but meaningful transition programs have proven to be helpful in addressing this outcome. In addition, universities and colleges are increasingly aware an important element of the overall question of Indigenous student transition, retention and graduation must address both the historic and contemporary "why"?

Why is it many Indigenous students do not do as well in Eurocentric educational programming? Thankfully, research is demonstrating Aboriginal learners can feel comfortable within Eurocentric academic institutions, even given the tumultuous history of Euro-Canadian relations, personal histories, community trauma, and alternative educational facilities with the assistance of competent and friendly guides (Battiste, Bell, & Findlay, 2002). Therefore, we believe Transition Advisors in academic institutions must be granted an effective sense of responsibility and be supported to ensure their presence on campus is highly visible and fully accessible. They must be approachable, friendly, and if possible, also Indigenous. In addition, they must be knowledgeable about the array of services available to incoming students across the entire breadth of their university or college environment. The literature suggests the goal of a Transition Advisor is not to act as a psychological counsellor for students, rather they are there to provide clear starting and finishing points to incoming and outgoing students who may require academic guidance services, housing and employment, and be a friendly face in a sometimes challenging environment. Indigenous students must feel they are able to access services through these advisors with ease, understanding and without judgement. This is especially important for first generation

[1] The term Aboriginal is used interchangeably with Indigenous as a term to refer to all First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples

students who may need access to mental health counselling for the new stressors they encounter, require essential financial supports, or additional help to move to the next level of their academic careers. Adelman, Taylor and Nelson (2013) refer to first year transition supports as an early "dropout prevention strategy" (p.43). As one Lakehead student shared when asked if they felt there was adequate assistance provided to help them get settled, "Yes, [I was] very well informed on orientation day with countless access to assistance, supports and a comfortable atmosphere" (focus group participant, 2013). Therefore, we believe these advisors play a critical role, because we know the first year of any level of education can be mentally and emotionally draining, and friendly accessible supports and advice always provide a welcome respite from stressful experiences. As one student put it, "I don't know if information is provided on local community groups, info on housing or suggested areas with good schools and good neighbourhoods, but I would recommend this, and an opportunity to speak to and meet with other students at LU and share experiences, or get and give advice" (focus group participant, 2013).

Transition advisors can ensure students meet their academic objectives and enhance their ability to enter a career path of their choice. In addition, the need for post-secondary completion continues to grow as many entry-level careers now regard a high-school diploma

as an insufficient indicator of competency. Preston (2008) notes increases in wages for Aboriginal men and women occur at "two key thresholds: with the completion of high school, and with the completion of postsecondary programs" (p. 8), strengthening the case for post-secondary education as a beneficial process. In 2011, the Steering Committee for Review of Government Service Provisions of Canberra, Australia noted, "culturally appropriate education for Indigenous students does not mean that different standards should apply to Indigenous academic outcomes"(p. 33), but rather Indigenous cultural education should be aimed at helping students enhance their education, apply it to their community development, and learn how to share their professional and academic knowledge with others.

In short, we all have to contribute to the successful completion of academic programming for non-traditional students and support positive Indigenous student transitions. One student at Lakehead noted, "An introduction so first year students get to know other First Nation first year students" would also help their transition (focus group participant, 2013). In addition, centering transition programs in culturally relevant activities and practices not only helps students who practice traditional knowledge and beliefs feel more connected with their university experience, but can also help students in a process of cultural reclamation and

revitalization. The Canadian Project of Higher Education Strategy Associates found the most successful and promising transition programs have a strong focus on solving or preventing the many challenges arising in the early stages of a transition process, are holistic, and have an emphasis on Aboriginal inclusion and participation (2012:31). As one student observed, "Pot lucks and food days are the bomb, and bannock and beading is great" (focus group participant, 2014).

According to the literature we reviewed, it appears Aboriginal Transition Advisors do in fact represent a strong point of access for students and can help them form a healthy educational identity, bond with the university community both on and off campus, and connect students to appropriate resources to ensure a positive and complete educational experience.

Methodology

This Literature Review was conducted by examining key papers, books, websites, journals and documents that focused primarily on transitioning programs. Many sources from other countries were readily available and accessible on-line. Comprehensive literature on programs supporting successful transition models was obtainable through a cursory web search and generally accessible to the public free of charge. A Statistics Canada literature review explored and built on much of the existing North American literature through quantitative analyses. Although, this literature review does not provide a comprehensive analysis of the data within the literature reviewed, it can still be utilized as a base for exploring relevant programming. While the focus was largely put on literature created in Canada and the United States, international literature and resources were also examined to obtain a broader scope of understanding of other transition program challenges and successes. Relevant literature focused on transition programming for students entering post-secondary institutions out of high school, returning to school as mature students, transitioning from remote communities to urban settings, and non-traditional students of varying ages and background seeking upgrading or higher education opportunities. We were especially interested in transition initiatives perceived as organic and holistic in approach over typical Euro-centric support structures found within most Canadian and American post-secondary institutions. We looked specifically for programs where students were enjoying an environment designed and rooted in traditional or Indigenous practices. It was noted this focus also appeared to help students who faced a stated lack of cultural experience in their personal lives feel more connected with Indigenous history and practices and enabled them to relate more effectively to their academic programs (Brown, Rodger, & Fraehlich, 2009: 9).

In addition, students attending Lakehead University were interviewed for quotes and statements on their own transition experiences from remote communities, from foster or

adoptive care, high school, or from urban experiences into academic programs here or at other institutions. One commented, "I felt that everything I needed in order to transition into university was handed right to me. So I guess I was provided an adequate amount of help to make the transition from high school into university" (focus group participant, 2014).

Students were asked to sign releases and ethical standards were adhered to throughout the interview process. Ethical standards included the incorporation of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP), the Utility, Self-Voicing, Access and Inter-Relationality Research Framework (USAI/OFIFC), and Chapter 9 of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Integrity in Research and Scholarship. All releases and interviews were locked in a cabinet in the Transitions Advisors Office. All students interviewed were given an opportunity to be photographed for the final document, were asked a variety of questions about their personal transition experiences and what recommendations they would have for a Lakehead specific transition program and model.

The questionnaire template can be found in Appendix A.

Two focus groups were held to discuss the findings of the Literature Review, with students invited from Lakehead University, Confederation College, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High

School, the Thunder Bay Friendship Centre, and the Regional Multicultural Youth Centre of Thunder Bay.

The results of the Focus Groups are included in Appendix B.

Finally, the interim report and final report were submitted to the Ogimaawin-Aboriginal Governance Council for review and approval. The report was then submitted to the larger academic community of Lakehead University for review and commentary prior to publication and our final release to the public and the Northwestern Ontario Indigenous community.

The Literature Review

High school is only one segment of the lifelong journey bringing students to post-secondary education. Aboriginal students face lower retention rates at all stages of the schooling process both in Canada and internationally. In Australia, the enrolment rate of "Indigenous Year 12 students was 32.1 percent compared to the non-Indigenous rate of 72.7 per cent" (Schwab, 1999: VII). The equivalent to year 12 in Australia would be a high school senior in the United States, or a student in grade 12 in Canada. Clearly, addressing recruitment and retention needs of Indigenous students before post-secondary engagement is essential. A strong secondary school presence, directed learning, and achievement can build the foundation for strong post-secondary engagement and success. University representatives,

including upper-level students, interacting directly with students in high school can help them establish a sense of identity and confidence before they make a formal connection with a post-secondary institution. Research demonstrates that inviting senior high school students to cultural events or workshops at the university level also gives them an opportunity to form a sense of familiarity and feel more comfortable and confident about a potential application. Ideally, these types of interactions and the Aboriginal Mentorship Programming (AMP) Lakehead University has initiated will allow for an easier transition process for students (Favell, 2013). Information and statistics highlighted in case studies from other countries, demonstrate requirements for successful transitioning of Indigenous students are similar to those in Canada. The literature reveals many matching social issues such as the need for active parental involvement and vocal family support, intact families, post-secondary mentoring, invitations to cross-educational events, and negative impacts from parental or previous student incarceration.

> "Maternal influence was a significant factor for most students in the group. The majority indicated that their mother was very helpful (63%) or somewhat helpful (21%) in their college planning. For the 85% who had a father or male guardian present, 43% said he was very helpful and 19% indicated he was somewhat helpful. Nearly three-quarters said that friends and peers were very helpful or somewhat helpful in their college planning. Though many students described how their parents encouraged and motivated them to attend college, they also indicated that their parents often were unaware of the many steps involved in postsecondary planning" (Noeth & Wimberly, 2002: vi).

Clearly, each of these circumstances can affect student recruitment, retention, and ultimately graduation, as well as successful employment and career development (Adelman, Taylor, Nelson, 2013: 46; Agbo, 2007: 1; CHiXapkaid, Inglebret, & Krebill-Prather, 2011; Pushor & Murphy, 2004).

The need to ensure high school student involvement can transcend borders and barriers is well articulated in Jackson and Smith's 2001 study of Navajo peoples transitions into post-secondary institutions. For example, this study highlights the impact family has on students attending post-secondary education, including the stresses of family financial issues. The change of environments between high school and post-secondary education and the importance of building relationships with faculty is also discussed (Shotton, 2013). Study after study demonstrated common factors and requirements in the experiences of

Indigenous peoples around the world with educational institutions, and the similarities were obvious, despite their own cultural uniqueness and differing countries of origin.

Transitions?

Transitions are the movements, passages or changes from one position, state, stage, subject or concept to another. These changes can be gradual or sudden, and last for differing periods of time.[2] They can be about peoples' genders, family loss or additions, academic achievement, or even the passage from one crisis to another, but they do not have to be done alone, and they do not have to remain a barrier to the kind of life students may be dreaming about or seeking to change for the better.

Celebrating all students – Lakehead University Respects Diversity!

At Lakehead we believe all students, especially those deemed "non-traditional" or somehow different from mainstream high school graduates, have a right to the kind of education and academic experience that will bring their dreams closer to reality. Even though the literature reviewed speaks largely to male/female transitions, we wanted to include the reality of gender diversity in this discussion as well (Rooney & Page, 2009). We included discussions on male and female transition needs, but then asked ourselves, what about the LGBTQA community and the transition issues they may encounter? Lakehead has a Gender Issues Centre (GIC) that offers two-spirited workshops throughout the academic year, and we believe we can build on and enhance this established framework. In some Aboriginal circles in Canada and the United States the LGBTQA community is referred to as "Two Spirited" a more "traditional or ceremonial identification" and organizations have been established to provide services and support to this diverse community in many large cities

[2] http://www.youngminds.org.uk/training_services/young_minds_in_schools/wellbeing/transitions

(http://ontarioeducation.wordpress.com/2011/05/25/ontario-education-and-lgbt-youth/). There is however, still a long way to go before acceptance of the LGBTQA student and their participation in society and small communities will be normalized.

> "I moved here because the reserve that I'm from, they're totally against gay or bisexual people. I lived pretty much my whole life trying to pretend to be straight. I had enough of it" (Bisexual male, age 19 years, NAHO, 2012:8).

Lakehead has already sought to provide an inclusive and welcoming environment for youth who are experiencing what amounts to a double, or sometimes triple transition when they enter university. LGBTQA youth must decide to attend university or college and leave their home community, they must decide whether they can come out to their peers, and ultimately their families, and they may also be navigating a transition from foster or adoptive care or any number of other experiences. We are aware there is more that can be done to address biases and strong sanctions against the expression of LGBTQA orientation on campus and in northern or remote communities. A review of the literature tells us our expectation of additional stressors because of gender has been identified in Canada, and some attention paid to alleviating gender diversity as a negative influence on academic achievement (O'Brien-Teengs, 2008).

Male Transitions, Challenges and Successes

Brighter Days Ahead by Robert Henry (2013) documents the thoughts and feelings of nine Canadian Aboriginal men, their experiences in gang culture and their ultimate journey out of it. The lived experience shared by these individual's anchors statistics to reality; they share similar stories about the impact of little parental involvement, single-mother homes, drug abuse amongst surrounding adults, their own early drug abuse, criminal activity and incarceration at a young age (Henry, 2013). Deliberately mentoring and guiding students from this type of background is difficult, but imperative to a successful transition program, retention and graduation. Brown, Rodger, and Fraehlich (2009) found gang violence was a factor for inner city youth drop-out rates, and noted, "violence and threats of violence by

gang members can interfere with an ability to focus on school, or make some youth fearful of making the journey from home to school and back" (p.51). Statistics Canada also identified in 2008/2009, that 27% of the adult population of provincial and territorial sentenced custody were Aboriginal, although Aboriginal representation in the Canadian adult population was only 3% (Statistics Canada, 2008/2009). These trends may reflect the perception that masculinity is only attainable for Aboriginal men through criminal activity, as stated by many of the participants throughout Henry's book (p. 95). Thankfully, those who shared their stories also related an ultimate realization that being masculine was actually not achieved through crime, but instead through being a good father and working hard to support their families. One participant writes:

> "I guess today, being a modern-day warrior is working and looking after your children. Making sure they've got food to eat and basically working to make sure your family has a good life is how I see being a man today. A warrior. And being humble and being involved with the ceremonies and you know, trying to help out, because a long time ago that's the way the warrior was" (Henry, 2013: 95).

Developing a transition program focused on helping underrepresented Indigenous males form a healthy sense of masculine identity would be a huge step toward success for these students and the academic programs receiving them. One way this can be done is by installing and supporting more male Indigenous teachers and professors in academia and

reinstating "rites of passage" ceremonies (Some, 1997). This is one important area of research needing more attention because many young men felt unprepared for increasing responsibility. One student noted that feeling 'well-represented' because of the number of Aboriginal students at Lakehead had it's own challenges, "They are well represented, but to a point where people think and solidify the stereotype that we ride on the Canadian government. [There is] a lot of racism here at Lakehead"(focus group participant, 2014). Perhaps year-one orientation programs would be a good place to start the conversation on Indigenous males from a traditional standpoint and why stereotypes need to be dispelled (Henry, 2004). Additional supports can be achieved through the use of traditional healing methods guided by Elders, and through communication rooted in empathy. The "I am a Kind Man' Program through the Friendship Centre Movement is an excellent place to refer young men experiencing role conflict (OFIFC, 2004). By encouraging individuals to connect with one another and providing them with a solid support network students can work with one another to stay engaged with their post-secondary community and extended family. The Aboriginal Initiatives staff at Lakehead University believes inter-relational violence can be counteracted through "deliberate"[3] mentorship programs and having experienced Indigenous students speak with incoming youth about their own positive relationship with education and learning. This can be as simple as having local high school students visit for an afternoon to talk about education and life experience with 3rd and 4th year university or college students. We also do not ignore the very real dangers of physical and sexual violence, alcohol abuse, and the need to provide avenues to personal and familial healing with alternative healthy activities throughout our programs to replace learned unhealthy behaviours.

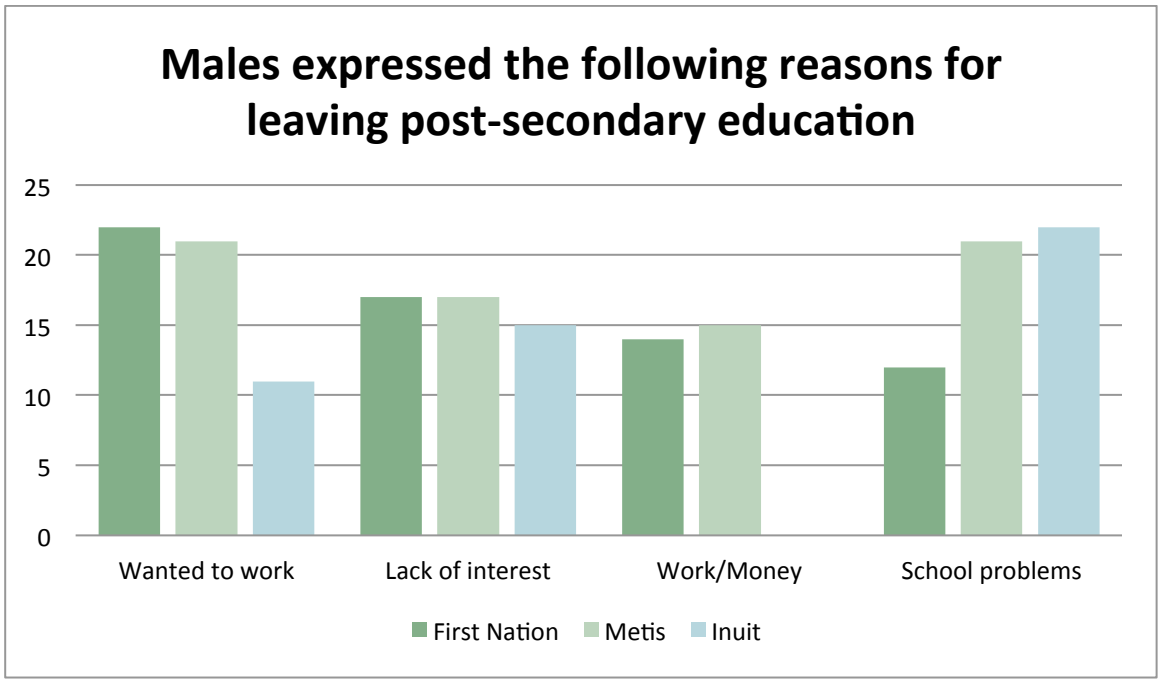
As one academic institution noted, "Our system of higher education, though officially committed to the fostering of intellectual and personal development of students, generally provides mentoring that is limited in quantity and poor in quality" (Levinson, et al, 1978: 334 in Johnson, 2002). Supporting student success is integral to creating a welcoming atmosphere, but there are always going to be students who do not access available services and are at a disadvantage because of it. When asked which services they accessed one student responded, "I haven't accessed any services at Lakehead yet, but I bet they are all pretty nice" (focus group participant, 2013). In a 2013 Indspire Report, only 64% of students accessed Indigenous services provided at their university (p. 7), with 132 accessing services often, 130 having used them at least once, and 114 never having accessed services throughout their academic careers (p. 8). The Lakehead Aboriginal Initiatives office believes intentional or deliberate mentorship will encourage higher-year students to inspire new students,

[3] Dr. Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, Vice Provost (Aboriginal Initiatives) at Lakehead is designing and heading up a networking program incorporating what she is terming "deliberate" mentoring through active engagement and on-going leadership training.

particularly those who are coming into a Native Access or Gateway Program and experiencing conditional academic terms (Restoule, 2011: 53), while providing healthy guidance and examples of positive behaviours. Requesting upper-level students to volunteer for mentorship will require the development of deliberate mentorship guidelines, training, background clearance, and terms of reference for new students to ensure all Lakehead students ultimately have an opportunity to give and receive safe 'deliberate and focused' support through their peers and our programs during their entire academic career.

The Neighbourhood Capacity Building Project (NCBP) and Urban Aboriginal Strategy (UAS) in Thunder Bay, has demonstrated how male youth who participated in drum circles hosted by Youth Outreach Workers were found to have better conflict resolution skills, more confidence, and were personally satisfied with the opportunity to learn about the drum and how it is connected to respect and conflict resolution in Aboriginal culture (Sakamoto, Johnston, Workman & Rasevich, 2009:39-41). Perhaps by employing a similar strategy at the post-secondary level, urban Aboriginal male students who are interested in (re)connecting with their culture can be given the opportunity to uptake the drum along with their academic courses and realize a positive outlet for their energy and emotions. It may also have a mitigating effect on substance and alcohol abuse, something that has also been identified as a challenge for incoming students with new found freedoms. Heckbert &

Turkington (2001) found that seventy-one percent of respondents who had been in the criminal justice system believed participation in Aboriginal spiritual and cultural activities such as drumming was a positive factor in their rehabilitation. Therefore, another form of support and cultural connection for male students could come from the implementation of student drum circles as an important method of social inclusion already shown to help urban-aboriginal youth connect with each other (Parent, 2011: 39).



Gilmore also recommends the use of client-centered planning, multi-faceted programing, and self-determination in his study on transition service planning for at-risk and adjudicated youth (2000:33). All three system approaches can be adapted and applied to those who have been in the criminal justice system, or are possibly heading in that direction.

A strong transition program guaranteeing a safe and welcoming environment, incorporating teachings on healthy male/female relations for all students, and demonstrating alternative healthy behaviours can help Indigenous students in particular adjust to new expectations in the post-secondary education sphere. This enhanced learning environment can be tied to cultural beliefs because Aboriginal spiritual and cultural practices focus on strong interpersonal relationships and working with one another to function as a community (Mohawk, 2010; Porter, 2008). Upholding long-standing traditional values and beliefs and making them a prominent aspect of post-secondary education will allow room for cultural development, but perhaps more importantly, they create a healthy transition to recovering discipline and responsibility (Mohawk, 2010; Porter, 2008; Stonechild, 2006). The words and teachings of our many community elders have provided a good foundation to build on, and

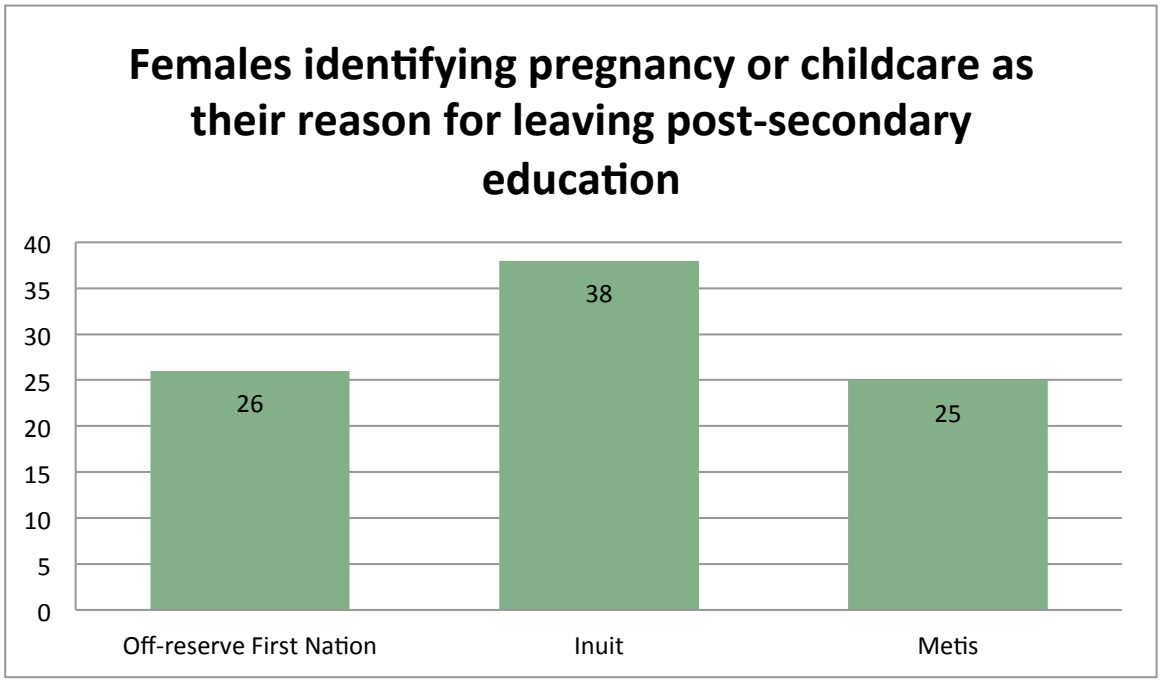
the Aboriginal Initiatives office is committed to creating a series of round tables over the next few years to bring elders and students together to share conversations, teachings, and goals for improving leadership, learning and positive community development.

Female Transitions, Engagement Challenges and Successes

As with Aboriginal men, Aboriginal women complete post-secondary education at a lower rate than non-Aboriginal women, with "thirty-six percent of Aboriginal women having a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree, compared to 50% of non-Aboriginal women" (Statistics Canada, 2012). Aboriginal women however, continue to complete post-secondary education at a higher rate than Aboriginal men (Statistics Canada, 2010: 2).

They also tend to seek out education through different pathways than other women, typically returning to high school and university as adults with a family in tow (Statistics Canada, 2012). This suggests the creation of transition programs for mature students with children, or adult student's who have been absent from education for a number of years,

which incorporate childcare in some significant way, can be a valuable vehicle to successful life-long learning. In focus groups at Lakehead University, several students noted, "supports for students who have kids" were important (focus group participants, 2014).



The disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal women attaining degrees remains noteworthy, but can perhaps be addressed through the implementation of transition programming that better recognizes and meets their familial needs. Resources focused on supporting Aboriginal women and their children during their post-secondary education may help to strengthen the number of Aboriginal women entering and graduating post-secondary streams. Research indicates Aboriginal women mainly pursue education in business management and public administration (Statistics Canada, 2012). One Lakehead student also noted they could have used, "more help and counselling to single men and women or single parents that have to leave children back home with family to attend school" (focus group participant, 2014). We believe leaving children in far away communities would be a challenge for any cultural group, and this could be addressed through a variety of ways with targeted assistance. Clearly, there are complex issues in regards to childcare and the ability of adult students to focus on their academic programs, while raising children they have with them, but significant issues also arise from those missing children and family they have had to leave behind to complete their educations.

The numbers of Aboriginal peoples in academia may seem comparatively low, but the increases in Aboriginal women (and men) pursuing post-secondary education are in fact notable. The number of Aboriginal women rose from 17% to 21% from 2001 to 2006

(Statistics Canada, 2006). The Council of Ministers of Education reports there are twice as many Aboriginal women enrolled in post-secondary education as males (Council of Ministers of Education, 2002:19), and note, "female students represent as high as 80% of the total Aboriginal program student body" (p. 48). Statistics demonstrate why providing academic transitional support is essential and confirms the need for continuing research and the implementation of services that meet specific (stated) needs. As already noted, along with higher enrolment rates, aboriginal female students are also more likely to be single parents. If they are unable to access care services for their children or accommodate their class schedules due to lack of funding or time constraints related to child care (p. 50) they may dropout early. It is possible to overcome academic barriers experienced by single parents (women and men) by helping students interact and create a student (parent) support network, and by offering workshops on balancing school with healthy parenting skills. Several Lakehead students noted, "there needs to be support for students who have kids" and we agree (focus group participant, 2013).

In addition, creating access to the many services Lakehead University and the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives offers in self-care, family care, in recognizing and resolving familial challenges, and getting students to accept support for mental health and well-being remains a consistent challenge here and on many campuses. Providing monthly feasts and access to

community gatherings on a regular basis, helps our single parents and kids feel welcome, and provides some financial relief to our young families. Our students have also commented, "education has become my pathway out of poverty" (general student conversations) and many have noted coming back to school was their way of showing their own children a way forward, and ensuring they could provide good food and shelter (NAP Instructor, 2013).

Review of Existing Transition Models and Case Studies

To better illustrate transition models developed across Canada and other places and assessed for usefulness in creating a Lakehead University Transition model, we have included the following examples:

1. Aboriginal Student Transitions Project – Ontario Native Education Counseling Association (ONECA)

Available:
http://www.oneca.com/Aboriginal%20student%20transitions%20FINAL%20031911.pdf

The focus of the ONECA transition model is on the provision of web-based tools to assist in student transitions to post-secondary learning. First Nation, Metis and Inuit (FNMI) students transitioning to post-secondary from a variety of backgrounds are included in the documentaries and narratives. The materials include information on alternative education centres, videos of mature students and youth completing their high school diplomas, and conversations with parents, elders, and friends addressing the challenges and triumphs of being in school, graduating, and seeking employment. Data was gathered from stakeholders with a variety of backgrounds in Ontario through a web survey and focus group sessions.

The web survey was created with open-ended questions to encourage comprehensive feedback and suggestions. The surveys took place from January 30th to February 28th in 2011 with one hundred and ten (110) participants, including eighty-eight (88) female participants and twenty-two (22) male. Along with students, stakeholders included family members, peers, education counsellors, educators, elders, members of the community, and recruitment workers. Potential barriers students faced included;

- Limited funding
- Racism and stereotyping
- Lack of parental responsibility or having sole parental responsibility
- Issues with preparedness, wellness, and confidence

Solutions to these issues are included in on-line workshops and videos to help students become better prepared for academic study and living. They are offered counsellor support, a strong guidance department presence, and the opportunity to visit post-secondary

institutions. This model effectively lays out how web-based resources can be effectively utilized by students. The strengths of this model include the ability to connect with one another with ease, enhancement of overall course and academic communication, the ability to join host webinars, on-line calendars, links to other valuable resources, and a range of daily activities and supports. Utilizing online methods of education are also valuable assets for those youth and adult learners who wish to stay in their home communities, but still want to access higher education. The model is limited because of the many First Nation communities without hi-speed Internet connections and the requirement of substantial funding for hi-speed start-up and maintenance.

2. LE, NONET research project – University of Victoria

Available:
http://www.uvic.ca/services/indigenous/assets/docs/lenonet/UVic_LENONETreport_2010.pdf

This project is focused on increasing graduation rates for Aboriginal students attending the University of Victoria and was supported by the Canadian Millennium Foundation. The model highlights an Aboriginal perspective and approach to education by noting the importance of culturally relevant activities and curricula. It espouses learning as a holistic and lifelong process, and as an experiential and communal activity. The main focus of this project was to create a positive learning experience for Aboriginal students and improve access to resources and programs. It was a four-year pilot that consisted of six student-focused programs and one for staff and faculty. The student programs included a bursary program, a peer mentor program, a community internship program, and an emergency relief fund. The staff and faculty program was aimed at deepening the understanding of Aboriginal culture and practices. One aspect of the project deserving further exploration is the need for participants to produce official evidence of their Aboriginal ancestry. Students who lacked this proof were excluded from this project, effectively silencing their thoughts and opinions. This is interesting because there has been a general push to encourage students without documentation to self-identify, thereby allowing them to declare ancestry even in the absence of official proof. Lakehead and many other Canadian universities allow student self-identification without the need for official evidence upon applying by simply checking a box on their application identifying them as Status, non-Status, Metis or Inuit. The number of students who participated in either the interview or survey was ninety-eight (98) and twenty-nine (29) respectively, with seventeen (17) participating in both interviews and surveys for a total of 144 participants. Students responded that the LE, NONET programs helped them feel more connected within the school community and they experienced relief from financial stress because of the funding programs. They did not find as much benefit from the peer mentorship program, and this is interesting to Lakehead

because of our intention to include a 'deliberate' mentoring component to our Transition Model. Our intention is to set this part of the program up so the mentors and mentee's choose each other, rather than assigning them. We intend to use a 'speed dating' format at our orientation sessions, which will allow a brief conversation between mentors and potential mentee's and will then allow them to choose who they decide is the best fit amongst the many mentors volunteering for the academic year.

3. ABORIGINAL TRANSITIONS: Undergraduate to Graduate (AT:U2G), Phase I, Phase II and AT:U2G web portal – The University of British Columbia

Sponsored by the Indigenous Education Institute of Canada, the UBC Faculty of Education (EDUDATA) Canada, the UBC Faculty of Education and funded in part by the BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, this model focused on examining existing graduate programming and mentoring models in British Columbia, as well as nationally and internationally. Existing data on several identified topics was analyzed and additional research conducted through focus groups, interviews and surveys.

Phase I of the UBC Aboriginal Transitions Guide: the "Undergraduate to Graduate" model created at the University in 2010, confirmed through interviews with students that familial support was not just about encouragement, but included financial support, help with childcare when needed and transportation when available (p. 34). All are components of strong (familial and academic) supports and central to recognition that Aboriginal-centric education is a communal experience, which can positively or negatively affect the lives of learners, their children, and other family members.

The web portal for this model is easily accessed and provides an in-depth look at the individual feelings and responses of students to programming through the presentation of narrated stories and video clips. This model gets to the heart of what much of the existing literature demands by empowering students and allowing their voices to be heard. This is not only beneficial for the sake of research, but is also inspiring for future students and those who access information through the portal. The reports for Phase I and Phase II as well as other relevant UBC research solidify the importance and need for models like this one.

There is a limited amount of literature or models dedicated to enrolment, transition and retention for Indigenous students at the graduate level. AT:U2G addresses this gap and provides insightful and useful information, and while the information is thorough, relevant and expansive, it is focused primarily on Aboriginal students in British Columbia. However, we believe models like this one could be adapted to meet the unique needs of Aboriginal students in Northwestern Ontario as well, and we are already preparing. The Office of Aboriginal Initiatives has recently created two new positions, a Transitions Advisor and a

Graduate and External Relations position and are revamped existing positions to respond directly to student needs at all levels.

4. Applying special education models to transition service planning for young offenders and adjudicated youth – The Department of Public Safety, State of Hawai'i.

Included in a substantial handbook produced by the department are key components to building a successful transition model. They address topics relevant to young offenders and adjudicated youth, and because this is a particularly critical discussion for students with non-traditional or underrepresented backgrounds, it is a welcomed and interesting discussion. The knowledge contributed by students with incarceration in their past is authentic and invaluable, but comes with a fragile connection to academic institutions. Because of this soft linkage, the information Gilmore provides should be valued and warrants further research.

Gilmore's work encourages self-determination, multi-faceted programming, vocational education and community-focused curriculum, with each area supported by a wealth of literature. This model is intrinsically linked to Aboriginal culture and practices and is based on the nature of individuals and their lived experiences. The text is structured to ensure the reader can appreciate the background of young offenders and adjudicated youth, and understand that trouble in their past does not have to mean they must be forever barred

from obtaining a higher education. Lakehead can incorporate their determination and passion. We believe every educational institution can ensure the people working to encourage these young people to attend school should also have the supports and encouragement they need. We are increasingly clear that adults and youth working together; works.

5. Aboriginal Student Handbook – Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association at the University of Victoria (2011)

Available: http://iahla.ca/wp-content/uploads/Aboriginal-Student-Transition-Handbook-Final.pdf

This handbook offers holistic approaches to transitions for students by beginning before the student comes to university. The handbook provides resources to help them identify their strengths and tells them how to allow those strengths to work for them on their university path. The steps are regarded as "Stepping Stones" and offer a thorough walk-through on areas identified by other institutions as well:

- Transitioning off-reserve while continuing to stay connected to their home community
- A comprehensive list of on and off-campus resources
- Methods of being prepared for and coping with culture shock
- Cultural resources in the academic community
- Management skills for academic, financial and health care needs
- Transitioning back into their home community

This model and handbook is exceptionally well written and is a powerful example of what a successful transitions handbook can look like. It is culturally relevant, aesthetically pleasing, and filled with accessible and approachable information for new and transitioning students.

6. Jackson and Smith Australian Study (2001)

Of the 10 men and 12 women who had graduated high school and shown interest in approaching post-secondary schooling in the Jackson and Smith study (2001), several factors resonated with Canadian Indigenous experiences. There was a strong correlation between family perceptions of attending a post-secondary institution, not being prepared for a post-secondary education, and the expression of a strong connection to their home community. This study articulated what it takes to evaluate post-secondary transition experiences and what factors contributed to positive student experiences. Their general

findings were congruent with other studies, which note support from family members and access to Elders, and a strong connection to cultural practices, were highly valued among student participants. In addition, the majority of those who participated in the Jackson and Smith study also noted that having an immediate family member who had gone to post-secondary school was valuable since they were more likely to understand the pressures university students face. Having parents or even siblings who have attended post-secondary schooling remains a challenge at northern Canadian academic institutions where many students are first generation learners, or, even more challenging, have parents who attended Indian Residential Schools who then expressed a negative view of education (Lafrance & Collins, 2003). They note interventions, which might help with student decision-making are incredibly valuable, and a transition program with strong supports for students uncertain about their goals or experiencing a lack of confidence would ensure they are aware of alternatives. The Statistics Canada's 2010 literature review notes, "There is little systematic literature on the career aspirations of Aboriginal people and their demonstrated ability to achieve those aspirations" (p. 2). Obviously, addressing significant literature gaps, especially in regards to their careers, no matter which country they are found in, is as critical to designing strong programming as helping Indigenous student's realize their academic aspirations and building their confidence within academic settings.

Significant barriers faced by Australian students in Jackson and Smith's study included not understanding which courses were required to obtain the degree participants were interested in or the educational requirements needed to suit career goals (Smith and Jackson, 2001). At Lakehead we now realize this dilemma can be resolved by pairing students with a Transitions Advisor who can help them set realistic educational goals and clarify the rough waters of academia before they get overwhelmed by the need to make multiple decisions. Transition advisors can help students visualize how their education might progress and help students understand what kinds of careers may be accessible with the degree they decide on, along with providing direction on how to transition to the job market.

Larimore and McClelan (2005) note that even when there are a wide variety of easily accessible resources both on and off campus, this does not necessarily mean they are performing effectively in terms of coordinating the delivery of services to individual students (p. 25). They suggest the professionals involved with student transition and retention, such as counsellors, residence and financial coordinators, and cultural support staff meet occasionally (as a team) to stay current in addressing and solving student issues (p. 25).

Although transition and bridging programs are intended to help students navigate academia with decreased stress and better supports, Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991) suggest Indigenous students are also seeking an education that, "respects them for who they are, is relevant to their view of the world, offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives" (p. 15). Taking these very valid viewpoints into consideration, the Manukau Institute of Technology (2011) suggests the integration of bridging programs as a halfway point for high school and college students will also help them to adjust to new or rigorous academic expectations (p. 21). Lakehead University has a Native Access Program (NAP), which has been in place for close to twenty-five years. The Office of Aboriginal Initiatives has decided it is now time to adjust the orientation of the program to better reflect the increase in Indigenous students with high school diplomas requesting a transition year. To meet our goals to inspire and graduate them into careers of their choice, effective 2015-2016, the Native Access Program will be renamed "UPP" and become the 'University Prep Program' for Indigenous Scholars and concentrate on new forms of preparation of Indigenous students for post-secondary challenges, successes and confidence building. These changes will include transferable credits, rigorous academic writing skills classes, and increasing course and audit choices to reflect a broader diversity of interests.

As noted, much of the literature reviewed for this report echoed similar points; it is absolutely critical for students to have support from family members, access to cultural activities as well as spiritual guidance, and adequate opportunities to seek counselling and support within their chosen academic field and setting. Furthermore, there is a growing

need for comprehensive and accessible information about post-secondary institutions and activities for parents and youth, which can be understood by Northern communities whose members may speak English as a second language (Cato & Luby, 2012: 16). Giving potential students and their families relevant information packages about post-secondary education, details on student conduct and academic expectations, which highlight the necessity of familial support and lots of direct encouragement, may increase Indigenous student registrations and make transitioning into a post-secondary institution a successful and empowering process. We are keenly aware that direct parental engagement and presence is an ongoing challenge at almost every grade level. The Office of Aboriginal Initiatives plans to address this deficit through invitations to innovative cultural events throughout the academic year, and through fostering parental engagement within our programming.

Any student, Indigenous or not benefits from the support of immediate family. However, because of the lasting legacy of Canadian Indian Residential Schools, some parents or guardians of Indigenous students may feel uncomfortable with the prospect of their children attending academic institutions due to their own historical scarring (Milloy, 1999; Miller, 2006; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). They themselves may also be very uncomfortable entering an academic institution because of their own or their parent's memories of abuse or commentary about teachers and education (Miller, 2006; Milloy, 1999). Therefore, we are working on creating more cultural events and accessible entry points.

The literature contained numerous interviews with both Indigenous males and females, which showed many of those who struggled with staying in school or left the education system early also battled substance abuse, had been in the child welfare or criminal justice system, or attributed barriers to their efforts as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and neglect in their childhoods resonant with historic factors (Milloy, 1999). Furthermore, Craven et al (2005) noted, "the quality of advice received by Indigenous students from family and friends is unlikely to be commensurate with the quality of advice received by non-Indigenous students from similar sources due to the disparities in educational experiences" (p. 143). Schwab (1999) also noted the gap in existing research, which might more clearly demonstrate how connections between parental trauma or professionalism, and school retention and graduation of their children are linked.

Our increasing understanding of the historic effects of attendance at Indian Residential Schools by family members, remind us how important it is that different forms of healing take place in academic institutions (Sinclair, et al, 2009). The Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) in 2008, found healing was of utmost importance to the community of Onion Lake, adding that healing included advocating for a drug-free lifestyle, maintaining a drop-in center and addressing the "collective well-being, healing and de-colonization" of their members (CCL, 2008:16). This research demonstrates how offering strong student supports and empowering students through a friendly and accessible network of community leadership, meaning chiefs and councils, staff, faculty and peers can be essential to creating a healing environment (CCL, 2008:28).

Grand Chief Stan Beardy of Muskrat Dam First Nation has been a powerful representative of the 49 Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities north of Thunder Bay.

There are many talented and dedicated leaders in this territory who are encouraging their youth to get an education and protect their First Nations from exploitation and unwanted/unnecessary change. Education ensures their children will have healthy communities to return to and ensures they can protect them.

This research also confirms that a large part of familial support is provided by simple, yet positive emotional encouragement and understanding.

The transition literature addresses the question of how universities and colleges might actively reach out to parents, families and community governments to help build relationships for the benefit of their children. Murphy & Pushor (2004) highlight Murphy's journey of connecting with parents to emphasize the benefits of creating a strong relationship between home and school while living and teaching in Fort Laird. Murphy introduced himself to parents via newsletter and soon made home visits so parents would understand the genuine interest he had in their children's education. The effects of Murphy's commitment to student success was demonstrated in the results; students were attending school at a more consistent level, parents felt comfortable enough to approach him when their children were struggling, and a sense of community developed through his interactions and support (Murphy, 2004). If more post-secondary institutions made an effort to reach parents and political leadership directly, they might bolster student confidence levels and parental/familial and community comfort with the institutions their children attend. The research reviewed for this report indicated this kind of outreach could be part of a larger healing process as well as be regarded as essential for student success (Sinclair, et al, 2009; Stonechild, 2006; Buffalo School Association, 2009).

7. Doctoral Research Study – University of Saskatchewan

Gokavi's 2011 doctoral dissertation explores the connections shared by Aboriginal people transitioning into upgrading and post-secondary institutions and how their varied backgrounds affect the process. Participant's reasons for attending post-secondary education included working towards a better life, pursuing specific career paths and addressing the challenges of personal and intellectual growth (Gokavi, 2011: 51). Sixty-three percent of identified Aboriginal participants in this study had gone through a transition program when they began university (p. 68). This study also found familial support was strongly related to academic success, although Gokavi noted, "a small portion of these interviewees reported their families viewed their choice in a neutral or even a negative light" (p. 76) but also noted the negative reaction from family did have an impact on their success. Gokavi relates how students felt their transition might have been made smoother – they suggested better use of orientation sessions at the beginning of the school year, and having undergraduate professors encourage discussion among students to help them develop a sense of community with one another (p. 79). This study was thorough and offered a wealth of valuable information. Gokavi identified several excellent starting points for new research rooted in evidence suggesting transition programming would serve students better if focused on Aboriginal backgrounds and practices in particular. In his conclusions, Gokavi found in order for students to transition comfortably and successfully into a post-secondary program, they required a strong support network made up of family, peers, professors and university

orientation programs, as well as student-community oriented programs put on throughout all university faculties during the year.

As already noted, recognition familial support is necessary was not isolated to Gokavi's study. The need for support and validation from family members was present across many studies. Ideally, every transition model would include a built-in system to help parents support their children across their entire educational journey. And, the support from peers remains an invaluable resource and provides the kind of connections and networks only kids can provide to kids.

8. Waikato Region, New Zealand Case Study Summary

According to the literature in New Zealand, a positive link between students and family members encourages students to reach for their full potential. Two case studies conducted in the Waikato Region found bridging the gap between home and school allowed for a smoother transition into the school system for young learners (Ministry of Education, 2009). The region found several ways to connect parents with the schools, such as allowing parents to engage with learning objectives within the schools and building distinctive relationships between home and school so students felt better supported (Ministry of Education, 2009). This was accomplished by implementing community programs that taught parents the importance of supporting their children in school by giving parents access to workshops and programs which increased their confidence through the development of new skills. The workshops and activities are outlined in greater detail in the "Waikato Region Case Study" (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Case Study One: Te Köhanga Reo o Ngä Kuaka

This Hamilton, New Zealand based program sought to give whänau the needed resources to feel empowered and have access to supports and services for vulnerable families in New Zealand as part of an early-intervention strategy imposed by the Ministry of Social Development and supported by the Ministry of Education (p. 22). Köhanga Reo is the movement to nurture the resurgence and growth of the Maori language.

Working with parents through surveys, workshops, guest speakers and other events surrounding personal health and wellness, the Köhanga Reo encourages parental involvement in child development (2009: 23). The project's main coordinator, Kathleen Harawira notes these supports help children to make more successful transitions into the school system (p. 23).

Case Study Two: Te Whänau Pütahi Childcare Centre

This early childhood family support center participates in the Parental Development Support project, the Te Whänau Pütahi Childcare Centre and provides services to single parent families (p. 23).

Workshops focusing on self-esteem help parents build skills that not only support their children, but also to encourage the growth of their own confidence. The Centre offers workshops with guest speakers, counselling, a food bank and an afterschool club as well as adult literacy and numeracy courses (p. 23). This inclusive programming fully endorses the idea of encouraging the education potential of children by supporting their parents in their own learning.

In Steedman's 2004 study, she noted high school students in New Zealand found living with extended family (whānau) beneficial. To be able to afford post-secondary education, they would stay with whānau to save on costs and to ensure emotional support (p. 21). We have found positive relations between school and family can also be dependent on lifestyle and whether or not it is suitable for a student who needs to concentrate on studying to live in a potentially noisy or crowded environment. Steedman's study was considerate of Maori needs and aspirations, and incorporated the following structures (2004, p. 6):

Mana – The research should make a positive contribution to Maori needs, aims and aspirations as defined by Maori.

Maramatanga – Enlightenment through explanation and the enhancement of mana. The Maori initiate research in conjunction with Maori communities as research partners, and include the power of veto or withdrawal of consent and information where the individual or the collective is at risk of physical or mental harm.

Mahitahi – Cooperation and collaboration, and involvement of a range of participants and stakeholders.

This structure can easily be adapted and compared to other Aboriginal cultural beliefs and values such as the medicine wheel and the seven sacred teachings. Applying beliefs and values to research structures helps to establish a connection with cultural practices and shows a commitment to creating relevant and supportive environments for Indigenous learners no matter where they live.

An example of how this would work is through teaching the four components of the medicine wheel as a method of self-care. The imagery and teachings of the medicine wheel help students to understand that physical (red), mental (yellow), emotional (black), and spiritual (white) health are equally important and provide a fundamental balance towards succeeding in post-secondary education.

Transition Initiatives: Canada and the United States

CHiXapkaid, et al (2011) note a "giving back to community" initiative would benefit Aboriginal students because they would be utilizing skills gained in university to help benefit their home communities and families (p. 13). Participants in this study expressed concern over the time required to achieve a post-secondary education and felt living away from their home communities for so long might cause a disconnect from their culture and families. This suggests it is important that a strong sense of cultural continuity with an emphasis on maintaining healthy relationships be accessible in post-secondary institutions. If a student must be absent from their home community for the majority of their high school and post-secondary education, especially in northern territories, they may well feel they are losing their connection to home. This can be remedied with adequately equipped cultural centres, a variety of cultural events, and regular access to 'Elders in Residence' to offer guidance or to perform a requested ceremony. Students coming from remote communities in Northwestern Ontario can also benefit from living with extended family members through saving money and having access to emotional support if they are not able to keep in regular contact with their family at home, and the home is deemed suitable for them.

The experiences and observations iterated in Favell's 2013 study of students can be beneficial to understanding and implementing cultural revitalization and a reclamation of history and identity. Incoming Aboriginal students do not necessarily possess traditional knowledge and cultural competency, but studies have shown building a sense of cultural identity and pride can be gainful in nurturing a healthy sense of self and contribute to academic success. When

asked if there was an adequate amount of cultural activity and support at Lakehead, one student noted, "Yes, enormous supports to connect with home, culture and learn new insights and more new friendships" (focus group participant, 2013). Favell (2013) found students enjoyed contemporary music fused with traditional music (p. 90), and artists such as Wab Kinew from Manitoba, A Tribe Called Red and Shibastik are a few good examples of fusion performance (see website references) Lakehead has either invited or plans to invite into the university and cultural services over each academic year.

Along with participation in culturally centered events, Favell found students who co-created their curriculum and classroom schedules were more involved and willing to participate, as they developed a stronger connection to their work in the classroom (p. 91). Although Favell reported a high volume of participants from Christian backgrounds, the majority of students felt very fulfilled learning about Aboriginal culture, although few of their home communities practiced traditional activities such as hunting and trapping (p. 96). Confirming Favell's claims, Bovil, et al (2011) found students co-creating curriculum, "prompts both students and academic staff to confront fundamental questions about the nature of teaching and learning" (p. 136), and both studies have contributed to the progressive retooling of educational institutions and their goals.

Munns, et al (2013) also found Aboriginal learners performed better and with increased self-confidence when given larger roles in academic responsibility. This interaction helped to strengthen the relationships between students and teachers (p. 7), and while the study was conducted at the elementary level, any age group can benefit from being empowered by their academic institution. This knowledge comes out of a deeper understanding of the impacts resulting from Indian Residential Schools and confirms the oft repeated observation, "the imposition of one worldview onto another [being] the most extreme form of human oppression as it eradicates the fundamental human need for meaning and identity (Nudler, 1990:187). Research has demonstrated, in the case of Canadian colonization, that First Nations' separation from indigenous heritage has created alienation, a profound loss of identity and a lower sense of self (Alfred,1999:8 in Sutherland, 2002), which we now know with care can be restored and rebuilt into a strong identity and powerful sense of purpose.

The National Indian Child Welfare Association in the United States (2005) has explored the importance of creating cultural connections and direct empowerment as well. This study found that youth felt, "their views were not seen as important and that the adults in the community did not see their possible value as contributing members" (Fox, et al, 2005:10). A critical component of engaging youth, especially those in the process of (re)constructing their identity as emerging Indigenous adults, can be located in how strongly we build confidence in their suggestions and acknowledge the value of their concerns and ideas.

Gaps in Literature - Barriers identified and requiring more research

While much of the research literature reviewed had a thorough and clear representation of issues faced by Aboriginal students in Canada and in several countries, some key issues remain relatively unexplored, and we believe they will require further research.

Rites of Passage for all Genders

Rites of Passage and their utility as a way to focus youth is a conversation we believe needs to happen across the entire country, and it is not well represented in the literature. We suggest the main reason is the dismissal of spiritual practices and prayer from the academic experience. We do know however, the experience of spiritual practices and ceremony has deep importance to Indigenous peoples. Exposure to drumming, sweat lodges and feasts has been shown to actively contribute to the cultural comfort as well as mental and emotional stability of Aboriginal students. Lakehead University intends to acknowledge ceremonial practices through the installation of "rites of passage" for Indigenous youth. We feel this is a necessary experience for all young people, and we will begin the process through the Aboriginal Initiatives and Cultural Services offices. In addition, we will observe summer and winter solstices and autumnal and vernal equinoxes under the direction of community elders and teachers. Our intention is to observe the March equinox by inviting all students to bring their little brothers and sisters to a luncheon or early evening feast, a tour of the university, and the laying down of tobacco. Once there has been an opportunity to introduce community Elders to each of the students, the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives and the Aboriginal Cultural Support Services hope to eventually host naming ceremonies with their help. For the summer solstice we will bring youth and elders together in a round table to discuss the purpose and value of rites of passage, leadership, building healthy identities, and the transmission of Indigenous knowledge. For the autumnal equinox we will invite all parents and caregivers to the university for a luncheon or early evening meal, a tour of the university, a round table with the elders and staff, a conversation on understanding academic challenges and successes, and the value of family supports and encouragement. For the winter solstice the Office of Aboriginal Initiatives at Lakehead University Thunder Bay and Orillia will host an elders tele-presence round table and dialogue with students and staff to review the year, set goals for the new year and share a winter feast and celebration in each location.

Perceived and experienced racism in post-secondary transitions

Racism towards Indigenous peoples is a hotly debated issue not only in Canada but internationally, and the literature has demonstrated many Indigenous students fear direct communication with non-Indigenous peers and professors because of it. For example, in Canada and the United States, they are frequently confronted with a widespread, but largely

incorrect, belief they receive a "free" education through government, pay no taxes, and get free housing, which is resented and held against them (Currie; et al, 2012: 620). Education can help people understand the realities of Indigenous lives. Perceptions of racism can be addressed by helping students to recognize actual and overt signs of racism and stereotyping and by teaching them how to effectively confront those whom they feel are actively expressing racial discrimination. We believe, it is also essential to teach "cultural intelligence" to the entire student body in an academic institution, along with staff and faculty, because there will always be people from different backgrounds learning and teaching in higher education (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004).

Unfortunately, there are still many instances of students experiencing racism in Thunder Bay, with one example being the fire on the James Street Bridge in 2013, which connects the city to the Fort William First Nation. In an extremely disheartening display, several citizens of Thunder Bay took the fire as an opportunity to share negative thoughts on the local First Nation:

One tweeting contributor was found to be a student at Lakehead University and had to face consequences outlined by the Vice Provost (Student Affairs) and the Vice Provost (Aboriginal Initiatives). These tweets provided evidence that racism against aboriginal people is very much alive in Thunder Bay. However, a positive outcome of the requirement to make restitution by this student was a visit to a local elder and participation in his sweat lodge. This experience actually changed the way the student felt about local Aboriginal peoples, demonstrating the power offering ceremony and spiritual supports on campus can offer. Issues like this need to be looked at with a critical eye and more education offered on what Indigenous people, in Canada, and in many other countries are facing on a regular basis. There is a reason social issues exist in any community, but we believe the lack of social inclusion and understanding can be overcome through invitational and experiential learning. Furthermore, all students deserve to feel comfortable in their learning environment and welcomed in a community new to them. Lakehead has continued to keep the sweat lodge open to all students who are interested in participating in a sweat and speaking to our elders.

Perceived or experienced racism can be a tremendous deterrent to students already facing ordinary struggles of adjusting to post-secondary educational demands. Combating potential student alienation means ensuring students are aware of and have direct access to critical services, especially those that assist with resolving issues of racism. Currie (2012) noted in their study that experiences of racism at the post-secondary level, "made it difficult to concentrate and want to succeed", for Aboriginal students (p. 622). Encouraging students to utilize services on campus can encourage a positive environment, or at the very least, provide a monitored conduit for students to address their concerns.

In January of 2014, the Aboriginal Awareness Center at Lakehead University hosted a community forum entitled "Building Bridges" with a panel of women from the community, including Georjann Morriseau, Chief of Fort William First Nation, to discuss the James Street swing bridge fire and open a healing dialogue between aboriginal and non-aboriginal students and people in the community. The forum was well attended by both students and community members. We have observed that preparing students to combat racism and stereotyping, and providing them with ample resources in the event they do have troubling experiences, gives them access to a stronger voice in their own defence (Cameron, 2009).

Cameron identified the following Key Findings

1. 68% of students reported awareness of services/supports available at their postsecondary institution. Generally students reported either high or low awareness at an institution, with one institution reporting mixed awareness.

2. Corresponding with awareness, 63% of students reported usage of services/supports. Post-secondary institutions with more visible, accessible resources directed specifically towards Aboriginal students reported higher usage rates. Students were also more likely to praise the quality of resources at these institutions.

3. Aboriginal Resource Centres and Aboriginal student counsellors were critical enablers of success. Additional positives were Aboriginal Studies/Language courses, helpful professors, and financial supports, all of which contributed to the retention of Aboriginal Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Atlantic Canada.

4. Aboriginal students identified racism and discrimination as a significant barrier to success. Students reported feeling isolated because of their ethnicity and entrance into a new and different environment. Financial difficulties were also a considerable barrier students encountered.

5. Echoing enablers of success, Aboriginal needs included Aboriginal Resource Centres and Aboriginal/liaisons student counsellors which provide academic and social assistance, as well as peer support and a sense of community.

6. Regarding motivations for pursuing post-secondary education, respondents believed attaining higher levels of education would help them finding employment in competitive job markets. Students also strove to be positive role models for their family and community by obtaining post-secondary education.

Recommendations

From this analysis of data, recommendations to improve current situations were developed. The following areas outline suggested steps:

1. Expand Aboriginal Studies/Language courses and raise awareness of Aboriginal issues for students, faculty and administrative members: These measures aim to promote knowledge concerning Aboriginal history/issues and eliminate racism and discrimination Aboriginal students encounter as they pursue postsecondary education.

2. Increase Aboriginal representation and input concerning University affairs: Improving the connection between the Aboriginal community and institutions will provide valuable insight and knowledge concerning Aboriginal educational success.

3. Increase Aboriginal enrolment and retention: Institutions must implement an Aboriginal retention and recruitment strategy specific to their own institution. This may include establishing Aboriginal Resource Centres, increasing awareness of supports for incoming/enrolled Aboriginal Students, and increasing Aboriginal scholarships and bursaries.

Comments

Planned workshops and seminars between institutions, investigators, and other interested parties including Aboriginal students will help generate realistic means for postsecondary institutions to enact change.

Culture Shock

If a student is living away from their home community for the first time, their experience coming to a new, larger city may feel exciting at first and then quickly become foreign and intimidating; this can make transitioning into a post-secondary institution uncomfortable. The experience of culture shock has been well documented and is recognized as a legitimate experience no matter what age or background students are coming from (Safety Abroad, University of Toronto, 2008). Providing relevant and appropriate activities for students to help them feel welcome and hosting events so students can build relationships with one another, figure out the city, and learn different behaviours can assist in creating an enjoyable adventure for those settling in a new environment. A University of Toronto paper suggests there are four states of culture shock (adapted to fit Northwestern Ontario experiences from U of T, 2008):

Euphoria: This is the initial stage of culture shock, which tends to blend in with the highs of planning a trip/move and starting off on an adventure. Like a new love, we tend to overlook some of the shortcomings and delight in all the new pleasures of being away from home. A 3-hour walk or bus trip to the closest market and source of food is simply a representation of how to enjoy the simple things of life. Everything new in this stage brings pleasure and feeds curiosity. We can enjoy this initial stage, but must be prepared for an eventual come down.

Anxiety: A growing amount of anxiety can develop during which the student may begin to feel helpless. The difficulties of living away from familiar settings, reading different body language and interpreting euphemisms, spoken language barriers, an absence of recognizable social cues and familiar geographic references can come to the surface. This can develop into frustration, anger and sleeplessness. Things like not knowing where and when to cross the street or how to find a way back to the market or your resident can result in a physical and emotional discomfort.

Rejection of the new culture: This is where that once acceptable 3-hour walk or bus ride becomes an unbearable nuisance. Students may find themselves thinking in terms of things being 'wrong' and 'backwards'. At this stage students may start to withdraw from the local and academic community preferring to surround themselves with other Indigenous friends and acquaintances. They need to beware the 3 am impulse to suddenly call a family member or friend back home, or to start packing to actually go home and abandon their studies.

Adjustment: With a bit of luck and advanced preparation, students WILL enter the adjustment stage. At this point students can recognize some of the perceived shortcomings of the host culture without rejecting everything. The 3-hour walk or bus ride becomes just that; a necessary inconvenience, friends are made within their programs, body language and euphemisms become easier to interpret, and social cues, even if totally different from home and hard to read, become acceptable ways to communicate and navigate in their new environment.

Homelessness & Housing Challenges

"First Nation homelessness crosses rural and urban boundaries, political and governmental jurisdictions, and gender and age boundaries. First Nation peoples, young and old alike, can experience homelessness in both rural and urban centres. Homelessness is affected by and contributes to poor social and mental health, damages family dynamics, contributes to family violence, racism, addictions, unemployment and shaky educational status. Students must have access to suitable housing. Homelessness is a complex issue" (SIIT, 2000). Homelessness, especially in the early months of an academic year, continues to be a serious challenge for Indigenous youth in Thunder Bay. It may be a late start, financial challenges, covert racism or ageism and a reluctance to rent to Aboriginal youth, or simply unavailability of affordable rental space. One of the issues identified at Lakehead is the disconnection between payment of monthly stipends to students by a First Nation and the expectation of upfront payment in full by the university residences. The Lakehead transition model will work hard to actively provide solutions to what we perceive as a solvable impasse.

Academic conduct and misconduct

Mature students who have been out of school for an extended period of time may be unfamiliar with the formal expectations of attending a post-secondary institution. Having these students enter through an Access Program, join a social or study group of their peers, acquire a "deliberate" mentor, or join a campus based toastmasters discussion will help them learn and adapt to expectations more quickly. Taking part in regular discussions on topics such as language and behaviour deemed appropriate for an academic setting can help students feel more confident in their ability to blend in and achieve their goals. Joining groups or meeting with an assigned mentor will give them opportunities to articulate their thoughts and adequately debate their opinions and options, whether positive or negative.

In order to help student's function effectively, schools must establish guidelines that plainly define rights and obligations appropriate to all university communities. Universities must

strongly support the right and responsibility of each student to work and study in a serene, respectful, nonviolent atmosphere conducive to the pursuit of knowledge (http://www.ehow.com/facts_6796899_university-student-code-conduct.html#ixzz2rQQbdHjO).

Below are examples from this website:

Honesty: To maintain the free flow of ideas and preserve academic integrity, students must acknowledge and stand by their work, abstaining from making misdirecting or false statements. Any form of academic dishonesty related to a student's status or performance is considered fraud.

Safety: University community members are entitled to freedom from suffering and deliberate anguish. The university is responsible for providing a non-hostile, non-threatening atmosphere in which to report physical abuse, brawling, harassment, hazing, assault and other antagonisms.

Violation of Rights: Any deliberate violation of a university student's rights or intentional failure to abide by proper procedures is a direct infringement of the code of conduct. Sanctions related to the character of the offense, including disciplinary warning, work assignments, administrative fines, restitution, room transfer, probation, suspension and expulsion should be actively considered and implemented (http://www.ehow.com/facts_6796899_university-student-code-conduct.html).

Engagement with youth

Building bridges for high school students and non-traditional students of all ages right across Thunder Bay is imperative to recruitment, transition and retention, and graduation. If Lakehead and its academic partners can help students form a relationship with the college or university and local learning centres before they graduate from high school or give up on higher education, they will feel more connected to learning as a whole. Opening a dialogue with city and regional youth to find out what they feel Lakehead, Confederation College and other learning centres across the region can offer them is an essential next step. We have

already discussed in this report how ensuring youth have opportunities to provide feedback has great utility towards their ultimate success and social integration. Positive opportunities to communicate what they hope to bring back to their home communities through their learning experiences will in turn inform a viable Transition Model for Lakehead University and the City of Thunder Bay and ensure they reach and even exceed their initial goals.

Including youth who are beginning high school in this dialogue and in Aboriginal Mentorship Programs (AMPs) will hopefully inspire a drive within them to attend university or college, or at least ensure they are aware of the multiple choices they have for learning and employment. The literature reviewed for this report suggested a focus be maintained on working with students who are beginning and nearing the end of high school. Showing youth a strong welcome to academia apparently influences students to consider their academic options more in-depth. Starting the conversation when they begin high school also ensures they know there is someone to provide guidance as they progress through their high school experience. Helin & Snow (2010) looked at the future of young Aboriginals in this country and saw the possibility of these young people alleviating the coming reduction in the workforce as "Baby Boomers" retire across Canada. Aboriginal youth remain the fastest growing demographic in Canada as one-third of the Aboriginal population is 14 and under, compared with 19 percent for non-Aboriginals (p. 10). Indigenous youth will have many gifts to offer Canadian society as we increase possibilities for learning, leadership and community engagement.

Influences of Peer Relationships

The relationships students have with one another can be powerful motivators with respect to educational success (Rodger & Tremblay, 2003: 14). If a student is not receiving support from family members, then having a network of individuals who might be sharing the same struggles can help ease the stresses they may face. Creating a network of students who are comfortable with one another has proven to be critical to school success and integration into the larger academic community. In addition, helping students realize the many issues they face are congruent with their peer's experiences allows powerful peer-to-peer relationships to be formed. Workshops with relatable topics, establishing an Indigenous Toastmasters club, and targeted activities available throughout the school year can foster positive relationships. The issue of minority groups showing patterns of disassociation from the academic environment has also received considerable attention within both national and international psychological and educational literature (Andrews, et al, 2008). Nevertheless, there is certainly room in the literature for further study of peer relationships in the context of designing and implementing transition models that better meet the needs of Indigenous and perhaps even international students. Several studies did touch on peer relationships, but

elaboration is required when it comes to Indigenous peoples and their strong orientation to communal practices at home and in urban settings (Wesley-Esquimaux & Caillou, 2010: 21). The findings by Andrew et al, in 2008 also suggest future interventions need to focus not only upon socio-demographic factors, but also the psycho-social variables that play a strong role in influencing Indigenous students' engagement or disengagement within the schooling system (Abstract). In addition, they need heroes, role models, and scholars they can relate to.

Chronic Lack of Funding

Over and above the demand for changes to curriculum, more student-oriented programs and other important suggestions for student enrolment and retention improvement, funding consistently remains an issue. To combat the lack of consistent and reliable funding for upgrading, certification and post-secondary attendance, creating student led events not only cut in-house costs, but assisted students in creating a stronger bond with their institution. These events also helped them develop skills to increase their employability (Ahearn, Merwin, Perkin, Olumide & Lamb, 2012). Interestingly, there is a plethora of literature on funding issues, the lack of funding, control of funding, caps on funding, and First Nation or Indigenous control of education and funding (Assembly of First Nations, 2013; Paquette & Smith, 2001), but the problem still remains seemingly unsolvable. This is something the Federal Government apparently made a commitment to through the proposed First Nations Control of First Nation Education legislation, but the 2016 kick-in date and implementation for this legislation has now been put back on the shelf. However, we know youth and their communities need financial assistance now.

Addressing Foster and Adoptive Care Responses

Another topic not often given the consideration it deserves is the impact of adoptive and foster care experiences on Indigenous students and their families. Students who have been raised by parents outside of their own culture are at risk for identity crises and cultural loss, which in turn can deeply impact the development of a healthy self-identity and ability to look forward to a successful future. One of the most notable instances of mass adoption of Indigenous children by non-Indigenous families occurred between the 1960's and the mid 1980's, and has been deemed "The Sixties Scoop" (Sinclair, 2007). In Sinclair's 2007 study surrounding trans-racial adoption there was a mixture of cultural support from adoptive families with some who did not bring culture into the child's life. One example of culture being implemented by non-aboriginal adoptive parents was one participant relating his experience with smudging at his elementary school where his adoptive father arranged for an Elder to perform a smudging ceremony at a school assembly to honour his adopted son's heritage (Sinclair, 2007:151). One method of improving culture awareness and identity in

aboriginal children adopted by non-aboriginal parents is to create a "cultural plan" (Fulcher, 2002 as cited by Carriere, 2007: 60). This can help to ensure a lasting relationship with the child's birth community, and help ensure a students' transition into post-secondary education includes knowledge and acceptance of Aboriginal awareness supports.

Focusing on Resilience

Youth and non-traditional learners who have formerly been in conflict with the law may experience particular struggles when transitioning into academic settings. Jagdatt-Gore (2012) noted this transition process is one that takes time. However, the Aboriginal Initiatives office believes a Coordinated Regional Learning Access Network focused on moving forward and creating a welcoming, supportive environment for these non-traditional students, will help them set goals and get them into suitable learning streams. When a potential student has experienced incarceration or substance abuse, it is important to supply the tools necessary to create progression in their lives. They need to be reminded regularly that success is important not only to themselves, but to their children, families and other community members. Creating an environment that celebrates students overcoming barriers helps to normalize the fact that the past does not permanently bar an individual from making positive changes in their present, and suggests education can deter recidivism and create a positive future (Karpowitz & Kenner, 2000).

Community Contributions and Challenges

In 2012, Jagdatt-Gore's study expressed how Aboriginal participants felt stupid and "invisible" in the school system, which in turn led to a lack of self-worth and a belief they were not capable of success (p.91). Perhaps, as part of a "student healing program" giving at-risk children Aboriginal University or College student role models would ensure they saw themselves reflected in higher learning circumstances. This may represent another academic barrier, although increasingly there are inspiring Aboriginal role models for students to relate to, whether they are recognizable names like Joseph Boyden or Tomson Highway, or more accessible role models such as local students and those supported by the National Aboriginal Role Model Program (http://www.naho.ca/rolemodel/). As one Aboriginal doctor put it, "It is true we need the Wayne Gretsky's to inspire us, but we also need the Elmer Fudd's to show us even mediocre folk can be a good student and achieve an MD" (Dr. Doris Mitchell, 2014).

Inspiration and role modelling could be achieved through community talks, student led workshops, food, clothing and toy drives, etc. This might also help post-secondary and college students connect with the community in a meaningful and holistic manner. Implementing a Coordinated Learning Access Network where Aboriginal and other post-secondary students are recruited to reach out to Aboriginal children in the community at

primary schools and community centres to improve their confidence will create lasting effects and lead to higher post-secondary entry, retention and graduation rates.

Leadership, Family and Community Influences

Aboriginal students often have a more direct relationship with authority figures in their First Nation and Metis communities, because in many instances leadership is blood-related because of the size of the community they come from. This closeness presents special considerations in educational experiences, whether it is related to the level of perceived support by the education counsellor in community, having adequate funds available to the home community by the Federal government, the direct influence of Chief and Council on how education dollars are dispersed, or other community related concerns. Students have complained about the ability to keep funding in place and continue their education when there is a direct threat of being "cut-off" for a variety of reasons, or because there are more students wanting to attend school than dollars available. Books often pose a similar problem because money can only be stretched so far over an academic year, and the price of textbooks is not reflected in the federal education dollars now allocated (AFN, 2013). In addition, we have to be aware some students have siblings or other family members who have dropped out and they may be influenced by their potentially negative experience or commentary. Or, in the positive they may have family or community members who are attending school and can be referenced as role models and supports.

Learning Styles

Limited literature has been generated on the learning styles of Indigenous peoples and the impact those learning styles may have on student retention and graduation. For the most part, authors agree that, "The evidence-based picture it presents is of a lifelong learning process reaching far beyond school walls to encompass learning that takes place in the home, the community, the workplace and on the land (such as learning from tradition, culture or

spirituality)" (http://www.ccl-cca.ca/ccl/Reports/StateofAboriginalLearning/SALCaseStudiesStory1.html). The 2009 Report on the State of Aboriginal Learning includes research that demonstrates cultural identity and ancestral language-fluency are strongly linked to higher rates of academic achievement in Inuit youth. Further, it shows First Nation communities with higher degrees of ancestral-language fluency experience significantly fewer suicides per capita: 13 suicides per 100,000 compared to 97 per 100,000 in communities with less language fluency. Clearly, taking cultural knowledge, history, and learning styles into consideration returns dividends to a community and very likely, to an academic program. For the approximately 1.1 million First Nation, Inuit and Métis people in Canada learning is a holistic, lifelong process which is not confined to the classroom, but rather is connected to the land, inter-generational contact and a diversity of personal experience.

Religiosity

Existing literature suggests a strong relationship between Aboriginal peoples and traditional culture, or at a minimum, some form of spiritual support must be included in any successful transition model. Lakehead University offers many opportunities for students to take part in spiritual activities, this includes smudging with the Elder in Residence, sweat lodges, feasts, and if there are any personal spiritual needs, students are welcomed to request and have them provided. We are now recognizing that although many students subscribe to traditional methods of spiritual practice and find comfort in connecting with Elders, smudging and attending traditional teachings and ceremonies, this may not necessarily be the chosen path for everyone. In a 2006 report by the Government of Canada entitled "A Matter of Faith: a Gathering of Aboriginal Christians", the strife between not subscribing to traditional Aboriginal spirituality is explored, with one participant stating:

> "There are people out there, in the Christian community that are being ostracised because of what they believe in. They're not allowing them to have a choice, and they're not opening doors for them. They believe that there is only this one way" (Government of Canada, 2006:18).

We believe academic institutions must not knowingly or even unknowingly discriminate against a student for their chosen spiritual practices and must offer them support where there may otherwise be none. At Lakehead University we believe it is essential to acknowledge and respect every student's belief or spiritual practice in our transitional supports. A 2007 Ed.D. Dissertation by Richard Elms, entitled "The Role Of Religiosity In Academic Success" speaks to the value of religion or spirituality in education and identified four major themes. The first theme had to do with perceived expectations placed upon the students by parents, religion and God. The second theme suggested adherence to religious values and behaviours allowed the students to focus their attention on academic pursuits

and not on academic distractions such as partying, sex, drugs, or alcohol consumption. The third theme addressed the perception that individual religiosity acted as a support system during school. That is, God was always there to assist them in accomplishing their goals and schoolwork. The final theme was related to a belief and understanding that religion allowed them to see the big picture and understand how educational success fits into the overall scheme of things (http://www.dissertations.wsu.edu/Dissertations/Spring2007/R_Elms_043007.pdf).

Alcohol Use and Abuse while at University

Another area of research, which could be expanded, might include focus groups and the voices of Aboriginal youth who have, or are, experimenting with alcohol, especially those who come from "dry" remote communities. I (CW-E) had Aboriginal students in my college classes fifteen years ago who claimed to be recovering alcoholics as young as 19 years of age, because they had started to drink destructively as early as 11 or 12 years of age. Honesty is a "teaching" that could be called upon to open a candid and informative discussion on what alcohol means to these kids, and what we could offer as a genuine replacement within an academic setting over the high they receive from alcohol consumption. Important conversations with various young people over the years have opened my eyes to the creation of alternatives and how to create "open doors" to their needs. One young man had the following to say to me in a small First Nation community several years ago, "We need people to listen to us, when I have a fight with my parents I need someplace to go to cool off, if there is no one willing to take me in, I just go and get drunk, what else is there?" and he added to audible sighs of relief because he was a very big young man, "you don't even have to feed me, just listen to me and I am sure I will be alright, but I would rather talk than drink anytime" (community workshop, 2004). Academic institutions also need to learn to listen and really hear what youth have to say about their lives, and the reasons they do what they do. It's not always only about receiving an education in academic subjects, sometimes they need to learn about management of learned or dysfunctional social behaviours too.

The Experience of Previous Physical and Sexual Violence

Another area of research we can address more effectively is the experience of violence in early childhood homes and communities of origin. When youth decide to attend university they cannot simply leave their life experiences behind. Many have seen or directly experienced events that have given them a feeling of being somehow "older" if not wiser, than their peers. It is a difficult inner feeling to name and resolve. I (CW-E) have had the personal experience of living in a household with domestic and sexual violence and I too felt very out of place with other children coming from homes where those behaviours were not known, and even if they were, we all hid it from each other and our teachers because of our

shame and confusion. It was not part of the conversation in primary school, but perhaps it would be appropriate in a university setting with counselling and assistance from peers and transition advisors in a supervised environment. We have to learn how to ask in an academic institution about the potential impacts of early experiences, and advise transition advisors on ways to identify and support the student who feels they have a history different from those around them. This of course isn't always the case, but if they do have negative personal experiences getting in the way of their studies, they need to resolve them so they can focus on overcoming academic challenges. In most instances, if they do not get to have those conversations with counsellors and their peers, they will continue to feel alone and this will affect their ability to be successful and graduate from their programs.

First Generation Students

Although this literature review has confirmed more can be done with this question, thankfully there is some very good research being done, and at least one recent report notes the following good news:

> "Overall, we find that first generation students are not too different from non-first generation students in terms of PSE experiences. Perhaps of particular importance to policy makers is our finding that first generation students are not more vulnerable than others when it comes to leaving PSE without graduating" (Finnie, et al, 2010:2).

Another study confirms what Finnie et al., found, and what this literature review has also concluded, that first generation students are not significantly different from other students. However, university services that bring new student and mentors, or transition advisors into closer proximity does appear to have a positive effect and seems to help ensure first generation students are retained and graduated. Saenz, et al, (2007) from the Higher Education Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles noted the following in regards to the expression of first generation student preferences:

> "This study may begin to shed some light on the conditions that enable private institutions to achieve comparable success…first generation students are attracted to private institutions because of their small size, a condition which allows for smaller classes, more opportunities to interact with faculty and enhanced students learning" (Saenz, et al, 2007:v).

This is something we can achieve at larger institutions by putting in place greater opportunities for campus engagement and academic success through cultural and dedicated services, mentors and faculty interaction. If it is the ability to engage with others and not be overwhelmed or lost in huge cohorts at larger institutions, than smaller institutions such as Lakehead University can more readily provide the closeness and support first generation students have indicated they need to graduate with their peers.

Indian Residential School History

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools is a story increasingly known by educators and informed adults across Canada, but it is still not well known amongst the younger generation coming into academic institutions. Many appear shocked by what they learn and have a difficult time placing the information they receive about the history of their own people and First Nation communities into their lived experiences and knowledge base. I (CW-E) had a student ask me, "What am I supposed to do with this information? I am so angry about what I am learning and I have no way to deal with it, what should I do" (Lakehead conversation, 2009)? I suggested she use the anger she felt to motivate her educational experience, learn what she could and take it home to teach others in a good way. I believe we can all do a better job informing Aboriginal students and community members about the history and impacts of Indian Residential Schools and ensuring information is delivered in a culturally intelligent manner to faulty and university staff.

Integrating international students

Leary (2011) found international students were also interested in transition services that would help them become more accustomed to a new culture (p. 13). Ensuring international students are made aware of cultural events happening on campus such as student pot lucks, annual powwows, and support services will be integrated into the Lakehead transition model. We hope this inclusion will inspire Aboriginal students to connect across programs and with International students. International students coming to Northwestern Ontario from vastly different climates and cultures may feel overwhelmed by cultural differences and struggle with urban cultural shock. Welcoming international students to participate in Aboriginal culture and practices may help them feel more comfortable and welcomed into the larger Thunder Bay and campus community. An international student transition can be compared to a student transition from a remote community because of the experience of separation from home cultures, spoken and body language barriers, a feeling of isolation and difference, and the potential culture shock that often comes with moving into new cities and countries.

Online Access

Lakehead University is in the process of creating new and accessible online programs like the First Nations Partnership Program,[4] which was implemented by the University of Victoria. Upon completion of the FN Partnership Program a student is granted a diploma from the School of Child and Youth Care. This kind of program allows an individual to stay within their community, cuts the costs of travel and securing living accommodations enormously, and allows the attainment of an education without the culture shock outlined earlier in this

[4] www. http://fnpp.org

report. On-line programs allow individuals to learn and apply their knowledge to their community work while they are building an educational experience, and earning a degree.

Next Steps[5] - Lakehead and a Coordinated Regional Access Network

We have observed a growing need to directly engage Indigenous peoples coming into urban centres to ensure they access academic or training programs across the city of Thunder Bay and the larger region. Lakehead University is proposing a Coordinated Regional Learning Access Network that will partner with local and regional community learning centres to ensure incoming or underrepresented Indigenous peoples are assisted as quickly as possible and supported in their bid for residency, education and employment. If they are interested in entering Lakehead University through our Native Access Program (UPP), they can be mentored through the paperwork and interview process. Or, they may instead be directed to Oshki-Pimache-O-Win Education and Training Institute, Confederation College, or a local Trades Training Institute like Matawa, if this is a more suitable route for them to education and employment. Aboriginal Initiatives at Lakehead will work with multiple partners to develop transition tools, host workshops, and convene round tables on public speaking, navigating urban environments, and student/employee conduct and interview readiness to assist those who are adjusting to post-secondary school environments, trades training or transitioning into an urban centre.

Transitions "Crash Course"

Before an academic year formally begins, putting on highly engaging orientation workshops may help students ease into understanding and respecting academic conduct and taking responsibility for structured learning. As an example, the University of Northern British Columbia provides orientation workshops on note taking, study methods, budgeting, promoting safe ways to spend extra time, and stress management (Holmes, 2006). The University of Victoria also offers a comprehensive guide for students that addresses culture shock, how to stay connected to their home community, clear budgeting advice and how to successfully transition back home after university (Leary, 2011). Holmes (2006) notes these programs continue throughout the entire academic year and in similar fashion, Lakehead already maintains a variety of transition workshops through the Student Success Center.

The Lakehead Transitions Advisor is creating a transition handbook for students based on this literature review and report. The new handbook will include key community resources, services provided throughout the university, a campus map, bus schedule, "what to do when" information, and other tidbits from sites like "teenmentalhealth.org" to help students adjust to their new environment. Advice on making friends, protecting mental health, personal safety, and other important social considerations will also be included in the Lakehead model and booklet.

The Native Access Program, soon to be renamed "UPP – University Prep Program for Indigenous Scholars" already offers an academic University Transitions course to help students ease into their university stream. However, other on-campus and on-line transition services are still needed for students outside the program, students who are just coming into Thunder Bay, those entering into different academic programs, or those graduating into the local or remote workforces.

New Curriculum: Preparing (new) teachers for remote communities

Student teachers in Partington's 1997 study struggled with cultural differences found in remote Australian communities. Teachers were confronted with students coming and going as they pleased, inconsistent attendance, educational gaps and poor general hygiene. They faced these issues, but even more challenging, they found implementing their own values and beliefs was then seen as a form of colonialism. There are similar educational issues found in rural and remote communities in Northwestern Ontario. Many new teachers go into remote northern communities after completing their teaching degree, often unprepared for the vast differences in behaviour and learning styles between students who have lived in a remote community their whole life and students from larger cities. Unfortunately, many

new teachers cannot pass even the most elementary 20-question quiz about Aboriginal terminology, history, cultural concepts, geography or regional Aboriginal diversities.[5]

Issues in remote communities, such as substance abuse and devastating poverty, can also have detrimental emotional and intellectual impacts on educators who are not adequately prepared to address or understand the history of colonialism, the life ways, or practices of northern peoples (Harper, 2000). The Office of Aboriginal Initiatives is working on the co-creation of educational seminars to help new teachers understand the social and cultural hurdles they are likely to face going into remote communities. These issues are similar to those met when going from one country to another unprepared for challenges inherent in cultural, social and political differences. The idea is to ensure teachers are properly armed with knowledge that will prompt their own resilience and ensure they are available to the children who need them. Being aware of the history, culture, and social implications of Indian Residential Schools and Historic Trauma (Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004), and being willing to reach out to parents in the community has already been shown to be integral to creating positive and enduring relationships. Wotherspoon (2006) found teachers benefited from a strong relationship with parents and students, as it helped them learn more about Aboriginal culture and they became more easily acclimated to remote community living and expectations. Teachers in remote communities faced with increasing distress over lack of parental engagement and higher workloads (p. 678), combined with other tensions, often succumb to a high-turnover rate. Similarly, Agbo (2007) found when the divide between teachers and the rest of the community was vast and palpable; teachers felt the parents were apathetic and refused to take action in their children's education, while parents felt unwelcomed to the school and that teacher's knowledge trumped their own. Keeping qualified and enthusiastic teachers in remote communities is absolutely critical to future successful educational experiences for Aboriginal students. Parents who may already feel disenfranchised due to negative past experiences, faced with the ongoing challenge of teachers quitting mid-stream in their primary schools, need better assurances their children will receive fulsome educational foundations before they get to high school.

Recommendations

- Complete assessment programs during the transition year to ensure students get into an academic stream best suited to their learning needs.
- Host workshops for academic writing, public speaking (Toast Masters), navigating urban environments, and conduct to help students adjust to academic expectations.

[5] See more at: http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/canada%E2%80%99s-aboriginal-education-crisis-column#sthash.HZvKEdxs.dpuf

- Create a program stream and rites of passage ceremonies for Indigenous males, which will contribute to and more clearly define a healthy sense of masculine identity.
- Do the same for young women coming from rural and remote communities.
- Work with parents or families of students to help them actualize the potential of their children and provide the guidance necessary for academic success. Having parents and younger family members attend university functions designed for them will help create a sense of pride and build a source of encouragement and ownership.
- Create a comprehensive transition handbook for students offering resources to on and off campus cultural interests and facilities, counselling resources, housing access, homework, budgeting tips, and "what to do when" guidelines. Perhaps two different transition handbooks will be more ideal: one for students new to Thunder Bay and off-reserve for the first time, and one for students living the urban community, but wanting to know more about academics, remote living and work opportunities.
- Invite contemporary performers to orientation sessions to engage students in a fresh and meaningful manner – provide role model and mentoring opportunities throughout the entire calendar year.
- Bringing youth and elders together each solstice and equinox (4 times per year) to ensure they get to know each other, can share information and learning, and create ceremonial opportunities with each other on a regular basis.
- Open the university community to the larger community to demystify the academy for the larger Thunder Bay population, parents and caregivers, high school students, and non-traditional Indigenous learners.

Conclusions

How will we know when Lakehead University students have met educational goals and our transition model has been successful? Indicators of success will be reflected in student retention and graduation rates; when students feel more comfortable and welcomed at our post-secondary institution and say so; when they feel confident in their abilities to stay put and graduate from their programs; and when the envisioned workforce impact is realized.

We strongly believe the future of Aboriginal education will honour traditional values and spiritual practices, Indigenous languages and social nuances, and highlight the vast contributions Aboriginal people have made to the development of this beautiful country, now known as Canada (Kirkness, 1999).

It is imperative universities "Indigenize the Academy" by ensuring the full history of Indigenous peoples is included in the curriculum and class conversations across every faculty and department. The President and Vice Chancellor of Lakehead University, Dr. Brian

Stevenson, has made a commitment to ensuring every Lakehead student will graduate with one course containing at least 50% Indigenous knowledge and history. Lakehead University is ahead of many academic institutions across Canada, as the only university with a Vice Provost (Aboriginal Initiatives) in place for over a decade and a mandate and strategic plan to be as inclusive as possible across all disciplines. The new Lakehead Law School and the Northern Ontario Medical School are also inclusive of Indigenous history and practices, and strive to increase the number of Indigenous students in their programs.

Times have changed, and universities must change as well to reflect the increasing numbers of Indigenous scholars and faculty. The world is waking up to the injustices perpetrated against this population in Canada. There has been a federal apology for Indian Residential Schools (2008) and an entire process of reconciliation has been unfolding across Canada over the last ten years (2009-2017). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is now wrapping five years of public hearing and will be tabling a report on "where we go next" to ensure an increasingly aware and inclusive future for all Canadians.

The transition model Lakehead is presently formulating will incorporate continuing student input and be based what we have learned through this Literature Review. The model will include the following four pillars:

Enhanced Family Connections – siblings, parents, caregivers and elders as visible and regular participants in building educational successes within the university and the larger community – the creation of invitational experiences.

Enhanced Ceremonial Practices – Rites of Passage acknowledgement for all genders, age transitions, and responsibilities. Where possible – cultural naming ceremonies, Indigenous Knowledge transmission, round tables and open prayer circles – support and acknowledgement of all religious backgrounds and practices.

Targeted Workshops and Training – Financial Management, Academic Writing, Leadership Development, Urban Living Skills, Negotiations, Public Speaking in our established Toast Master's group, Parenting skills, Child Development, etc.

Network Building with Paid Internships and Practicums – Building strong student networks, job search and interview skills, and business acumen to prepare them for employment, set disciplinary standards and build internal responsibility through participation in targeted and culturally responsive programming.

Appendix A

Questions

Name:

Please circle those that apply to you

Gender: Male Female Other

Urban Remote

Did you feel there was adequate assistance provided in helping you to transition into Lakehead University? If not, please explain why

What services do you think would make further transitions smoother for you (into senior years, undergraduate to graduate, university to career)?

What services would you recommend Lakehead put in place to help future students transition more easily into university?

Did you feel there was an adequate amount of cultural activities available to you?

What areas did you feel required more information to help you transition into university better (financial aid, bursaries, housing, etc.)

What services at Lakehead did you enjoy the most?

What services did you utilize the least?

What kind of transitions workshops would interest you?

Do you feel Indigenous students at Lakehead are well-represented? If not, please explain why

Do you receive adequate emotional support from your family?

Appendix B

Responses

Name: Primarily Anonymous Responses

Please circle those that apply to you

Gender: **Male** 5 **Female** 7 **Other**

Urban 7 **Remote** 5

Did you feel there was adequate assistance provided in helping you to transition into Lakehead University? If not, please explain why

Yes – 12 **No** – 0

What services do you think would make further transitions smoother for you (into senior years, undergraduate to graduate, university to career)?

Survey Example: "A get together of students to meet other students to talk about programs or courses each person is taking to gain support and friends"

"An introduction for first year students to get to know other First Nation first year students"

What services would you recommend Lakehead put in place to help future students transition more easily into university?

Survey Example: "Meeting students who are in 3rd or 4th years to guide first and second year students"

Did you feel there was an adequate amount of cultural activities available to you?

Yes – 12 **No** – 0

What areas did you feel required more information to help you transition into university better (financial aid, bursaries, housing, etc.)

Survey Example: "The tutoring and financial aid"

"Financial aid/bursaries"

What services at Lakehead did you enjoy the most?

Survey Example: "Tutoring, cultural supports"

"Smudging, potlucks, bannock & beading"

What services did you utilize the least?

Survey Example: "Tutoring"

What kind of transitions workshops would interest you?

Survey Example: "Some kind of get together for first years to meet other first years"

Do you feel Indigenous students at Lakehead are well-represented? If not, please explain why

Yes – 9 No – No answer-3

Survey Example: "Hard to say as I usually don't pay attention to much things because I'm usually just in my own zone."

Do you receive adequate emotional support from your family?

Yes – 3 No – No answer- 9

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