

***Education for Aboriginal Learners:  
Challenges and Suggestions as Perceived by School Principals***

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**Abstract**

According to school principals, the purpose of this paper is to identify issues that negatively influence the educational experience of Aboriginal students and to offer real-life examples focused on addressing these challenges. This qualitative multi-case study encapsulates 13 semi-structured individual interviews conducted with five Saskatchewan principals and four Prince Edward Island principals. From the perspective of nine school principals, challenges were pedagogical and curricular issues, student transition and attendance, the legacy of residential schools and other parental issues, and financial and resource issues. Implications of the study pertain to professional development of teachers and hiring procedures of school districts.

**Introduction**

Although Canada's educational system is one of the best in the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014), throughout the nation, students of Aboriginal heritage experience some of the lowest graduation rates among developed countries across the globe. Decades of persistently low graduation rates among Aboriginal peoples are, first and foremost, an educational injustice. Moreover, as the Aboriginal populace in Canada are increasing at a rate approximately four times faster than non-Aboriginal populace (Statistics Canada, 2013), endorsing high quality education for Aboriginal peoples advocates for an invigorating, fortifying future for Aboriginal peoples, their families, and their communities, while simultaneously supporting the health and sustainability of the entire nation. Having Canadian leaders, teachers, and citizens focus effort, attention, and finance on improving the educational realities of Aboriginal students who attend school today has great potential for improving the social, environmental, and economic vibrancy of communities across Canada in the near future.

One of the steps toward education for Aboriginal students is to first identify the challenges that Aboriginal students commonly face. This research recognizes school principals as playing an influential role in identifying these challenges, because school leaders have first-hand knowledge of the educational system and curricular and pedagogical details. Moreover, school leaders fall witness to how the system influences Aboriginal students. In turn, according to school principals, the purpose of this paper is to identify issues that negatively influence the educational experience of Aboriginal students and to offer real-life examples focused on addressing these challenges. This qualitative multi-case study encapsulates 13 semi-structured individual interviews conducted with five Saskatchewan principals and four Prince Edward Island principals.

### **Literature Background**

Literature and research that depict the challenges that Aboriginal students commonly experience in education highlight perpetual colonial influence (Archibald, 2008; Battiste, 2013; Smith, 2012) and systemic racism (Clark, Spanierman, Kleiman, Isaac, & Poolokasingham, 2014; de Plevitz, 2007). These issues align with Battiste's (2013) recommendation that Indigenous knowledge and ways of knowing need to be an integral part of education in public schools. Additional factors contributing to negative educational experiences include the lingering consequences of Canadian residential schools (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006; Gray & Beresford, 2008), and educational policies that counter attempts to value Indigenous cultural integrity (St. Denis, 2010), and having few Aboriginal teachers and principals with whom Aboriginal students can identify with during their schooling (Desroches, 2005). With regard to the latter point, across Canada, there is a pronounced need for more Aboriginal teachers (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, & Pearce, 2012; St. Denis, 2010). Also pertaining to teachers, there is a lack of quality Aboriginal undergraduate education for pre-service teachers (Deer, 2013; Kitchen, Cherubini, Trudeau, & Hodson, 2010; Mills, 2013). In other words, "Evidence points to the need for higher education, and especially teacher education, to become better informed about the concerns of Aboriginal peoples and to be more responsive to their needs" (Wimmer, Legare, Arcand, & Cottrell, 2009, p. 817). As final point, much research speaks to the funding discrepancies of federally-funded band operated schools and provincially-funded public schools (Richards, 2008).

One study that described the educational challenges experienced by some Aboriginal people in Prince Edward Island (Preston, 2014) involved 55 participants. These participants represented off-reserve Aboriginal grandparents, parents, and Kindergarten to postsecondary students. In the study, many of the student participants spoke of how they felt like failures when they tried to accomplish academic tasks and that these feelings negatively affected their self-esteem and desire to go to school. Students talked about the negative experiences they had when transitioning to a new school. The research also depicted

parental frustration with school personnel. More specifically, when parents attempted to meet with educators in school to talk about their child's issue, parents felt both overpowered by the system and unheard. Both students and parents talked about the direct and indirect racism that they believed was imbued within their education. This research and other literature (Aikenhead & Mitchell, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Richards, 2008) also highlight that schools need to develop a culturally affirming learning environment, which proactively profiles and uses Aboriginal cultural values, curricula, and activities.

### **Methodology and Research Design**

This research is located within the qualitative research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Patton, 2015). Denzin and Lincoln (2000) indicated that qualitative researchers "study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). In this study, we described the perspectives and experiences of school principals who attempt to promote the intellectual and social wellbeing of Aboriginal student enrolled in their schools. In turn, within this research, we focus on documenting the views and social encounters of these participants. In conducting this research, we were mindful of Indigenous research ethics and methodology (Battiste, 2008; Chilisa, 2012, Kovach, 2009). Although two of the five authors were not Aboriginal (i.e., Jane Preston and Tim Claypool), one of these researchers had received in-depth Medicine Wheel teachings and experienced many Aboriginal sacred ceremonies (e.g., sweats, smudging, etc.) prior to conducting this research. As well, Brenda Green (Wahpeton Dakota First Nations, Saskatchewan) collaborated with the study team. She offered the research team the knowledge, experience, and personal connections with Aboriginal principals and communities, increasing the trustworthiness and dissemination of the study. As well, Jill Martin (Listigouche First Nation, Quebec) and William Rowluck (Lytton First Nation, British Columbia), Aboriginal graduate students, provided their Aboriginal knowledge and academic skills during most stages of the research. In addition, in line with Aboriginal methodologies, before analyzing the data, we consulted an Aboriginal Elder helps the researchers understand fundamental aspects of an Aboriginal worldview.

Bearing in mind that there is no recipe for choosing *the right* research design (Barbour & Schostak, 2011), the research design we believe that best aligned with this qualitative work was multi-case study (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2014). Yin explained that case studies often are used for research based on real-world contexts and research that requires an in-depth description of a social phenomenon. Our research does, indeed, focus on the real-world context of Aboriginal learners attending public schools. The social phenomenon under scrutiny is how school principals identify and address some of the challenges Aboriginal learners face. Yin also explained that case studies are used for three main

purposes—exploratory, descriptive, or explanatory. In our descriptive case study, principals *described* the issues that negatively influence the educational experience of Aboriginal students.

Although most types of qualitative case studies do provide generalizable information about an issue, case study is extremely valuable for preliminary research on a topic not well researched (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Because we could not find published research on our topic (i.e., principal views on Aboriginal student challenges), a case study design was ideal.

Moreover, this research incorporated a multisite approach, where data were collective in the provinces of Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island; also known as a multi-case study, collective case study, or multisite study (Merriam, 2009). By looking at the range of similar and contrasting situations in the two provinces and grounding the data in the contextual realities of school principals, we enhance the transferability of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

### **Participant and Analysis Description**

With the help of the research collaborator, for recruiting participants within Saskatchewan, emails were sent to a select number of principals known to have large numbers of Aboriginal students within their schools. Five individuals volunteered to participate. With no research collaborator to assist in finding volunteers in Prince Edward Island, the researchers sent emails to 30-plus principals across the island whose schools were located near an Aboriginal community and were thought to have had a notable number of Aboriginal students enrolled in their school. In turn, four Prince Edward Island principals volunteered.

Interviews are a mode of data collection where researchers can access areas of reality (e.g., subjective experiences, views, and attitudes) that would otherwise remain inaccessible (Peräkylä & Ruusuvuori, 2011). Because it was our intent to access such reality, our data comprises individual semi-structured interviews (Merriam, 2009). Such interviews were highly personal, because the interactive social process provided insight into the participant's lived experience (Ponterotto & Grieger, 2007). In total, nine participants were involved with 13 semi-structured, audiotaped interviews (Barbour & Schostak, 2011). The average length of an interview was 60 minutes. Of the five Saskatchewan principals, one participant was interviewed twice, and, due to time restraints, the four remaining principals were interviewed once. Four Saskatchewan participants were male and one was female. All four Prince Edward Island principals were interviewed twice; three of the participants were female and one was male. Of the nine participants, eight were non-Aboriginal and one participant was Aboriginal. All participants were given pseudonyms in place of real names. To assist in identifying the location of participants, Saskatchewan participants have pseudonyms being with 'A', 'B', 'C', 'D', and E (i.e., Adrian, Bob, Colin, Darcy, and Ellen), and Prince Edward Island participants were given pseudonym

being with the letter ‘S’, ‘T’, ‘U’, and ‘V’ (i.e., Stuart, Trudy, Ursula, and Victoria). Saskatchewan participants were interviewed once, and the average time for these four interviews was about 80 minutes each. Prince Edward Island participants were interviewed twice, and the average time for these eight interviews was 50 minutes each. For three Prince Edward Island participants, the time between the first and second interview was two weeks. For one Prince Edward Island participants, the time between the first and second interview was seven weeks, due to scheduling conflicts.

Participants were school principals of public elementary, junior, and/or high schools. All participants had Aboriginal students enrolled in their school. Two Saskatchewan principals, had schools with an Aboriginal student population of approximately 80–98%, and three Saskatchewan principals had an Aboriginal student population of about 10–30%. Due to the limited numbers of Aboriginal peoples in Prince Edward Island, in general, all principals from that province had a limited number of Aboriginal students in their schools (e.g., 5–10%). However, the Prince Edward Island schools actually represented schools with some of the highest enrollments of Aboriginal students within this province’s public schools. We viewed this difference in Aboriginal student population desirable as it provided for a range of contexts for the research. (See Table 1 for an overview of participants and their schools.)

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b># of Interviews</b>	<b>~% of Aboriginal Students Enrolled in School</b>
Adrian	Saskatchewan	M	1	10–30%
Bob	Saskatchewan	M	1	10–30%
Colin	Saskatchewan	M	1	10–30%
Darcy	Saskatchewan	M	1	80–98%
Ellen	Saskatchewan	F	1	80–98%
Stuart	Prince Edward Island	M	2	5–10%
Trudy	Prince Edward Island	F	2	5–10%
Ursula	Prince Edward Island	F	2	5–10%
Victoria	Prince Edward Island	F	2	5–10%

**Table 1** - Participant Description

Griffiee (2005) reminded researchers that raw data, such as interview transcripts, do not in themselves reveal meaning; rather, transcripts must be interpreted. In an effort to create meaning, the researchers read each participant’s interview in its entirety, gaining familiarity with its overall content. Then each interview was reread, but more systematically, to create categories of key ideas, phrases, commonalities, differences, and patterns that were embedded in the transcripts (Stake 2005). Within each of these categories, the data was subdivided into the study’s two participant groups (i.e., Saskatchewan

and Prince Edward Island participants). At this point, we read and reread the information and converged the multiple categorical themes into larger theme(s) in response to the research purpose (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). These thematic groupings (aka the findings) are represented in the next section.

## **Findings**

The purpose of this paper is to identify issues that negatively influence the educational experience of Aboriginal students and to offer some real-life examples to address these challenges. From the perspective of nine school principals, challenges focused on: pedagogical and curricular issues; student transition and attendance; the legacy of residential schools and other parental issues; and financial and resource issues. Below, each of these topics is explained and suggestions to address these barriers are provided.

### **Pedagogical and Curricular Issues**

With regard to education for Aboriginal students and its barriers, all Saskatchewan participants and two Prince Edward Island participants spoke of pedagogical and/or content-related issues. With regard to pedagogy, Victoria believed it is extremely important for teachers to understand the talents of each Aboriginal student, “teach to the student,” and celebrate the ensuing success. On this topic she said:

Every child’s success looks differently, and not all our children are going to be Einsteins per se. But, all of our children will find a place in this world if they are shown to be valued for who and what they have to offer. The educational system beats that out of children sometimes, and that’s really unfortunate.

Victoria went on to describe her frustration with an educational system that places great emphasis on having each individual child achieve specific, one-size-fits-all outcomes. She stated:

We are servants of a department that dictates standards and the benchmarks our children are supposed to meet. As we all know, our children don’t always fit into that box ... I think sometimes with the benchmarks and the predetermine markers, in education we get hung up in our children achieving those. If they don’t, we look at it as failure.

Darcy provided a suggestion for this situation—relationships. He explained, “Approach those Aboriginal kids with a different perspective. Engage them in an authentic relationship, and you will find that deficit thinking disappears.” Stuart believed in promoting student-teacher relationships, students should have the choice to participate in after-school teacher-lead sporting and fine art events. He went on to explain that for any Aboriginal students who partook in these extracurricular activities, transportation home was provided. Ellen believed that building strong student-teacher relationships was a precursor to Aboriginal student achievement. She explained what such a student-centered relationship can look like:

We look at the kids who are stuck at that Grade 10 level and seem to continue to struggle and struggle and struggle ... We came up with, what we call a Bottleneck Program ... We had a teacher helping students in bridging math, and, from there, they went on to the regular math program ... And we have a teacher who works alongside students also in individual or in small groups at the math level from grade four to grade nine.

Ellen also depicted how student-focus content can promote academic success. She said, “We have had students taking online courses. We purchased what you call a Play Dough program. It’s a software program that is individualized, but it can also be set up so that students are working at their own pace.” Darcy explained that to promote individualized learning, teacher in his school use “...a lot of problem-based learning so students are constantly engaged with each other, with the teacher, with whatever the curriculum content is.”

On the topic of content, Adrian added, “The curricular options for these kids need to be meaningful, and they need to create real world experience.” Adrian addressed the challenge of ensuring course relevancy by explaining that, within his school, they offer an apprenticeship program. “They [the students] can get credit and lined up with a plumber. They get high school credit, and that first year counts towards journeyman status. So kids can go through the trades here” (Adrian). Stuart relayed the similar information and said, “The students have the option of doing their first block of apprenticeships ... in welding, automotive, carpentry, and hairdressing.” Stuart added that he encourages Aboriginal students also to take Advanced Placement (AP)<sup>1</sup> courses, if they are slightly interested. With regard to AP offerings, he explained that whether the student was Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, “the expectation is, if you can handle it, go for it.”

One final aspect with regard to the relevancy of course content related to Indigenizing the curriculum. In particular, Darcy had much to say on this topic. For Darcy, Indigenizing pedagogy means, as the teacher:

I have to give up some control in the classroom. I have to allow that learning process to be a little more collaborative and perhaps a little more messy. But, without a doubt, that is where we should be going in the 21st century, because you are picking up those big critical skills, real creative thinking, real problem solving, and real collaboration.

Darcy went on to explain that Indigenizing pedagogy is akin to good teaching that is focused on student success.

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<sup>1</sup> Advanced Placement is an academic program that is at a university level but offered in high school. A first-year university credit can be earned if the student learns the AP curriculum and passes the examination.

### **School Transition, Transiency, and Attendance**

All participants talked about the importance of having Aboriginal students feel a sense of safety and belonging when coming to a new school. As Adrian echoed, “It really starts with that sense of belonging and identity.” Colin believed that many Aboriginal students feel alienated when first arriving to his school. He used the story of a couple of Aboriginal student to example how he helped alleviate the challenge of feeling isolated upon transferring to a new school:

Last year, very early on, we had a couple of [Grade 9] students who wouldn’t complete work... So for whatever reason, I had someone suggest to me, “Well you know what? You should get this particular student to talk to them, because that student was just like that, last year.” ... We had that student come in. That student talked to that other student. It was a phenomenal discussion, really, really good.

Colin went on to explain that this incident was the catalyst to creating a student mentorship program for new Aboriginal students who transition to his school. As a part of the Aboriginal Student Mentorship Program, the mentor could receive credit for their mentorship. Colin added that, since the start of the Aboriginal Student Mentorship Program, high school student mentors are now considering visiting Kindergarten to Grade 8 band-schools. He explained:

They’re going to be providing after-school programming back out [name of First Nation community] twice a week. So these students are going to become mentors to the K–8 kids, and they’re going to be facilitating different types of activities, healthy lifestyle, athletic programming.

In Bob’s school context, many Aboriginal students transfer from a nearby band-operated elementary school to his public high school. Bob also identified this transition as a challenging time for Aboriginal students and was constantly questioning what he and the staff could do to make every Aboriginal student feel a greater sense of belonging upon entering the new school. In addressing the challenge, he explained within his Grade 9–12 school, the staff created the logo, “Belong, Respect, Care, and Inspire.” Each word became the core focus of a specific grade: Grade 9—belong, Grade 10—respect, Grade 11—care, and Grade 12—inspire. Bob said, “So those four values are connected to the things that we do in [and focus on] and around the school.”

In line with transitioning to a new school, Bob identified transiency as the grave challenge that many Aboriginal students face. In particular, he said:

The biggest challenge is still the transiency that exists. When I look at some of our cumulative folders and see some of our elementary kids coming to us from 11, 12, 13 different elementary schools, it causes, obviously, gaps in their learning. So there is not anything wrong with the intellect but the gaps that are created from all those moves. And the same thing happens in high school as well, just moving back to the reserve or from one high school to the next, for whatever reason.

Bob then provided a suggestion for addressing this challenge. He stated:



So if I could create the perfect world it would be to bookmark that student and not make them start from the very start again but to get them to carry that like a passport and now they're going to start with unit two ... But just the way the systems set up right now, with the computer, with Maplewood we call that, we can't do that. So with the curriculum changes and the outcome based education and the indicators. I think there is the potential now that if the kids got the outcome done, you know what, it's going to be a checkmark.

Darcy also spoke of the challenges of Aboriginal student attendance and also commented on Bob's idea of helping Aboriginal students complete courses in a timely fashion. Specifically, Darcy said:

One of the most discouraging things for students, any student, but we're talking about First Nations kids who come here and their experience in the system is they keep getting pushed out of school because of attendance issues, pushed out, pushed out, pushed out, start over, start over, start over. There is nothing more discouraging than think, "Damn, I did half that class and then shit happened. I've got to start all over." ... So, we've gotten rid of this semester thing where kids are, I say, burdened with five or six classes that they're taking at one time, and now you're taking two. The added bonus of that is that they're getting really intensely into a particular subject area.

In sum, creating courses that span a short time frame may be a way to promote successful completion of the curriculum.

Also, on the topic of attendance and its challenges, Ellen had a number of things to say. She said, "We still struggle with attendance. We still struggle with students finishing high school over three years, Grade 10, 11, and 12." Adrian believed that student attendance, itself, was not the issue. On this point, Adrian said:

If you want to get me revved up, tell me that attendance is an issue in our schools today. It is not an issue ... it points to symptoms. It's because they are having issues at home, maybe alcoholism and drugs, maybe they are homeless or couch surfing. Maybe they are working too much or gaming all night. We as admin deal with a lot of attendance issues, but those are not the problems. They [the students] are having issues in their lives.

Darcy believed that one way to improve attendance was to have student-focused courses that motivate the students and make them want to come to school. To target improved attendance, Adrian indicated within his school, Aboriginal students are provided with subsidized public transit rates. Colin described one of the things they do to promote student attendance.

We have a book on the bus—an attendance book, and it comes into the school. My outreach worker will look at it, e-mail these ladies as to who's not there, and, if these people do not have access to phones, they drive and find out why the student isn't there.

In turn, these participants relayed many suggestions for addressing transition and attendance issues. Individual students' circumstances can be complex. However, participants repeatedly expressed the need for educators to consider the whole student when assessing their needs. This holistic approach is not new to our Aboriginal colleagues but unfortunately is an area that our non-Aboriginal teachers and administrators may be in need some of some education.

## **The Legacy of Residential Schools and Parental Issues**

Another issue that many participants spoke of was residential schools. Specially, on this topic Adrian explained:

[Another] barrier is the effects of residential schools. This isn't something that is going to go away. An Elder said it is going to take six or seven generations of not having residential school to have culture and lives normalized again.

With regard to residential schools, Stuart said:

When I was meeting with a mom and a boy on [name of First Nations community], she said that even though she trusted us, she found it difficult. Physically coming in to see us was a negative thing. Why? Things were not really positive for that person when that person was in school. Even though we put the past behind us, sometimes it's in front of us.

Trudy mirrored this comment when she said, "Many parents here would not have had good school experiences themselves, so getting them in here is a really big challenge." Adrian summed it up and said, "So, we have to be cognizant that there are parents who are not comfortable with a White guy sitting in the office."

In additional to residential schools, there were parental challenges associated with Aboriginal student success in school. Ursula added, "Sometimes it is hard for Aboriginal parents to support their children with homework" (Ursula stipulated that the same held true for non-Aboriginal parents, too). Bob indicated that, in his school, there are a lot of single parents, "so Mom is working two jobs." Darcy also talked about the challenges related to parental involvement. He said:

I think we are not great at that [parent involvement] to be honest. But, at the same time, high school and parents relationships ... I think we can beat that a little too hard. High school parents don't necessarily want to come to school with their kids right, and nor do the kids what that.

In addressing challenges associate with parental involvement, Stuart explained that in situations when the parent was unable to get transportation to the school, Stuart drove to the parent's house. Colin believed parental involvement was essentially about building relationships. He said, "Again, it comes back to relationships, and making sure that you're taking the time to meet with the parents, in constant contact with the parents." In an effort to forge positive relationships, usually every day after school, Ursula was physically outside chatting with any parent who was around. Adrian was proud of the fact that he physically meets every parent in the school. Ellen ensures that the school invites parents to the school for interactive, enjoyable events. She stated, "Parents are quite happy if you ask them to come in and do beadwork with the kids. We have more success in doing that than say, having them come out for a meeting."

**Financial Issues**

A final challenge many participants spoke up pertained to lack of finance and resources. For example, Ursula was frustrated by the lack of books with an Aboriginal focus and content. Ursula talked about when the librarian requested to order a variety of Aboriginal books. Ursula agreed that indeed more Aboriginal books needed to be in the library, but Ursula had to restrict the numbers of books the librarian could buy. Ursula said, "Would I have loved to have ordered them all? Yes, 100% yes. Would I have loved to put them in all the classrooms, so kids can relate to the stories? Of course!" Also with regard to limited finances, Trudy talked about the importance of the breakfast program in her school and she said, "I am trying to run a breakfast program, and you need to get money from different places in order to do that." Victoria explained that she wanted to supply professional development with regard to Aboriginal culture to her staff, but, due to the restricted budget and a school-wide focus on literacy, she was unable to do so.

Darcy explained that, due to limited funds, he is constancy looking and applying for grants to help provide for what his Aboriginal students need educationally and personally. Darcy said, "We get grant funding to gather resources and user support teams to alleviate the worst effects of poverty ... We solicit extra funding so we can give them breakfast." Bob talked about a community member who has helped many Aboriginal students in need of resources. Bob explained:

One particular individual has set up a website where our kids can log on and with the permission of a teacher, they can ask for what they need. So if they need glasses or if they need their tuition paid for to go to a sports camp then he just comes by and drop off a cheque.

Also with regard to money, Adrian brought up another important point, where he highlighted the educational funding discrepancy between federally-funded band operated schools and provincially-funded public schools. On this topic, he succinctly said:

Well, the lack of funding in the band schools is abysmal. It's a great shame of our generation. If residential schools were the great shame of the last three generations then lack of funding is the shame of ours. We may have got the access to education correct but why can't they be funded the same as our provincial schools?

Interestingly, other than principals being increasingly responsible for finding grants, writing grants, and, in general, accessing outside-of-school funds, the participants had no suggestions on how to address finance issues in education. This is a reminder that these innovative individuals have their limits too. However, rather than being discouraged by the apparent inequities and systemic financial short-falls participants chose to take whatever action they could within their own circumstance. Their inspirational leadership created a template for others to replicate while reminding us that significant changes in

governmental policies and funding structures were needed as much as an integrated approach to enhancing student support services at the classroom level.

### **Discussion**

The participants, themselves provided a number of solid suggestions in addressing the some of the challenges that Aboriginal student face. Many of these suggestions align with past research. For example, Tuharsky, Buisson, Burns, Birttton, and Enrion (2005) spoke on the need for educational leaders and teachers to build upon Aboriginal students' sense of belonging in schools through promoting safe schools, acknowledging student achievement, and enhancing student-teacher relationships. In building strong teacher-student relationships, supplying a variety of after-school activities was a motivator of Aboriginal student success (Preston & Claypool, 2013; Tuharsky et al., 2005). With regard to the need of Indigenizing pedagogy, school leaders and staff need opportunities for professional development in the area of Aboriginal culture and ways of knowing (Aikenhead & Mitchell, 2011; Kanu, 2011). As indicated by Claypool and Preston (2011) mainstream assessment techniques need to be revamped to reflect a more holistic assessment of the student's academic, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing.

A number of policy-related and pedagogical issues can be addressed based on this research. To name few, educational leaders, teachers, and students need to co-create assignments that are both relevant and meaningful to students. School districts need to continually examine their hiring protocol and practices so that Aboriginal teachers and administrators are, at least, proportionate to student demographics. School districts need to support the professional development of their teachers, specifically with regard to Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing. Having teachers learning about the intricacies of Aboriginal worldviews helps students, teachers, and administrators more fully understand and respect each other, which, in turn, enhances trust, generates synergy, and promotes innovation and productivity within these relationships. Moreover, school districts need to recognize the invaluable presence of Elders in schools and financially and socially support Elder in residence programs in public schools across the country. Postsecondary Bachelor of Education programs need to promote distance education courses with Aboriginal communities to support the accreditation of more Aboriginal teachers (Preston, 2008).

As a closing remark, when educational leaders and teachers address the educational challenges commonly faced by Aboriginal students, they are addressing the needs of all Canadian citizens. This point hold much validity within the Aboriginal worldview, which views all things throughout the universe as connected via shared energy. In turn, when Aboriginal students succeed, that success is radiated among everyone.

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