



# BEYOND SHADOWS

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Success

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## **COVER**

### **The Art of Balance: Finding Harmony with Nature**

Rock balancing is an art in which rocks are placed in various arrangements using the earth's gravitational threads to create balance. No tricks or aids are involved; the rocks stand precariously sturdy and fragile in the midst of equilibrium. This testament to the art of balance can be found on the rocky shores of Remic Rapids in Ottawa, Ontario, where the river swirls among the rock sculptures and the conjoining of differences establish a harmonious whole. Created with nature's elements, only the force of nature may dismantle the sculpted landscape, which provides new endeavors every year for the artist. International balanced rock sculptor, painter and photographer, John Felicè Ceprano established the Ottawa Rock Art Inc. (ORA), a non-profit corporation which provides on-site workshops, performance artists, as well as hosts the Balanced Art World International (BAWI) festivals in Ottawa.

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This paper addresses themes that emerged from the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) July 2013 President's Forum on First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) education. Strategies, programs and wise practices for wholistic Indigenous student success in Canada are highlighted and discussed. Current research focusing on equitable education environments based in social justice philosophies, inter-agency approaches, culturally relevant pedagogy, system wide change and inclusion are presented. A highly visual journey navigates the complexity and necessity for immediate action aimed at fostering understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as key. Advice, teachings, models and principles from students, educators, researchers, leaders, Elders and other stakeholders on Indigenous student success are infused throughout.

*Keywords: First Nations, Métis, Inuit, student success, education, social justice, inclusive pedagogy, equitable schools, inter-agency, engagement, colonialism, Aboriginal, Indigenous*



# I LOST MY TALK

by Rita Joe (1932-2007)

I lost my talk  
The talk you took away.  
When I was a little girl  
At Schubencadie school.  
You snatched it away:

I speak like you  
I think like you  
I create like you  
the scrambled ballad, about my word.

Two ways I talk  
Both ways I say,  
Your way is more powerful.

So gently I offer my hand and ask,  
Let me find my talk  
So I can teach you about me.

(English Fruit, 2013.)

Elder Gordon Williams at the July 2013 Canadian Teachers' Federation President's Forum reminded our diverse group of teachers, administrators, students, policy makers and leaders that we are at the heart of change. He was speaking about the need for all of us to be creative in our approaches to building, healing and restoring First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) communities. This journey, our Elder emphasized, will be a long one that will force us to confront the shadows<sup>1</sup> cast by colonialism and its legacy on FNMI peoples<sup>2</sup>. This was a respectful call to our collective group to rethink how we honour Indigenous students in our classrooms. It was a clear message, embodied in Elder Gordon Williams' stories and experiences, that action and change was required of us. The first critical challenge is to shift the colonial gaze onto ourselves and examine our own locations. The second critical challenge was to work together in more effective ways to make a difference in the lives of FNMI students.

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- 1 Shadows refers to long-term effects such as poverty, mortality, limited access to education, abuse, lack of self-worth, loss of language, loss of culture and neo-colonialism.
  - 2 FNMI is the abbreviation for First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Peoples. However, in this paper the term Indigenous will respectfully be used throughout this article in its place.

This paper will explore the preceding challenges through an examination of the issues, literature, research and wise practices in Indigenous education. The framework for discussion will be the themes as identified in *Figure 1 – Themes in Beyond Shadows*.

**Figure 1 – Themes in *Beyond Shadows***

This figure identifies the topics that will be pursued in this paper.





# SHADOWS OF COLONIAL EFFECTS

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Systemic racism is foundational to colonialism. It is so embedded in societal institutions that it is often referred to as the hidden barrier (de Plevitz, 2007). Those with power cannot see it and those without power experience it. It is so prevailing that it often limits equitable access to education, health, economics, wellness, political representation and other factors that are essential to leading a good life<sup>3</sup>. Systemic racism is a living entity and one of its main allies can often be mainstream media. All we need to do is think about how Indigenous people are portrayed in the news, on the web, in movies, in pop culture, or, how they are omitted entirely (Burleton & Gulati, 2012; Reporting In Indigenous Communities, n.d.).

The effects of systemic racism are far reaching and often adversely impact the relations between Indigenous Nations and non-Indigenous Nations. Allies of these colonizing forces (whether consciously or not) continue to perpetuate distorted images of Indigenous peoples. In Reporting in Indigenous Communities (n.d.) an Elder is quoted as saying “the only way an Indian would make it on the news is if he or she was one of the 4 Ds: drumming, dancing, drunk or dead” (p.1). This observation of the media (which is transformed into the mindset of popular consciousness) is often also combined with the image of the warrior. The resulting impacts do not permit a positive or accurate representation of Indigenous peoples. It positions Indigenous Nations as troublesome, stuck in the past, as victims and as aggressors (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

This negative narrative of Indigenous peoples is ingrained in societal institutions. A focus of deficiency amongst Indigenous Nations is systemic racism and it plays itself out in the development of policies and programs that further limit Indigenous rights to an equitable quality of life (Carr-Stewart, 2009; Carr-Stewart, 2006). It is further demonstrated in relationships between students on playgrounds, in classrooms and in schools when Indigenous peoples seek to assert their rights (i.e. global movement of Idle No More). Critical educational change is rooted in shifting the gaze to the structures of society, examining how our own actions are affected by these structures and seeking ways to reframe/rebuild inclusive human rights based educational environments (Pidgeon, 2008-2009; Smith, 2003).

Residential schools, federal day schools, stereotypes, racism, oppression and poverty are only some of the shadows cast on Indigenous peoples. These shadows resulted in the culmination of living statistics on a Nation of people (i.e. high mortality, low graduation rates, increased diabetes, youth suicide among others). Bringing collaborative light and Indigenous truth is critical to moving beyond these shadows (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003). Resilience, relationships, reciprocity and a respectful regard for the inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in schools are the summative insights of Elder Gordon Williams<sup>4</sup>. Rethinking education to honour Indigenous students and build bridges between all students means to explore and include:

- Land based experiences and character education opportunities with Indigenous cultural resource people (i.e. Elders, Métis Senators, Traditional Knowledge Experts) as key facilitators (Capurso, 2010; Ritchie, Brinkman, Wabano, & Young, 2011).

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3 Good Life is a term amongst many Indigenous Nations that refers to living a balanced life physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

4 As a participant in the Canadian Teachers' Federation President's Forum in July 2013 these are the insights that I drew from Elder Gordon Williams.

- Critical thinking activities and action research projects that challenge stereotypical images, address current Indigenous issues and confront colonial history in authentic partnerships with Indigenous communities (Kirkness, 1999; O'Connor, 2009).
- Local Indigenous worldview and global Indigenous connections that highlight the diversity and richness of culture, traditions, values, contributions and uniqueness of these many Nations (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2002; Silver, Mallet, Greene & Simard, 2002).
- Culturally competent pedagogy in schools that is derived from strategies, content, resources, protocols and concepts that reinforce Indigenous self-esteem and that model wise educational practices for all students (Toulouse, 2011).

Indigenous student success requires educators, administrators, policy makers, leaders and other stakeholders (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to deconstruct those shadows of colonial effects that permeate our actions and relations. The time is now and that difficult journey is what our students and future generations need from us today. A commitment to real change with valued partnerships, creative planning and action is the immediate call (Canadian Teachers' Federation, n.d.).

# SOCIAL JUSTICE AND INTER-AGENCY ALLIES

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“It takes more than money to foster change...” (G. Williams, Personal Communication, July 8, 2013)

We are called to action. Social justice principles and processes will be a critical tool in initiating significant educational change. As teachers, policy makers, leaders, administrators and other stakeholders; the celebration of diversity, equitable access to education, addressing the roots of poverty, interrogating privilege and embracing hope are key to our collaborations (Ottman, 2009). Meaningful involvement of Indigenous students and communities are the leaders of this journey. They have the knowledge, agency, solutions and teachings to guide us (van der Wey, 2007). Indigenous youth, Elders and Indigenous parents/guardians are integral to this meaningful shift and the power of this community is clearly reflected in the Project of Heart (2013). The activities at Project of Heart (2013) have real impacts as teachers and their classes engage in an “inquiry based, hands-on...inter-generational [series of activities] seeking truth about the history of Aboriginal People in Canada” (p. 1). The videos created by these students (and their teachers) at the Project of Heart website demonstrate the transformative nature of this approach (see videos at [www.projectofheart.ca](http://www.projectofheart.ca)).

Social justice is based in an ethical framework of defending human rights, preserving the dignity of people, achieving equity/inclusion and re-humanizing individuals and groups. The methods are action based and focus on the building of allies (in truth and understanding) for change (Redwing-Saunders & Hill, 2007). Project of Heart (2013) was well represented at the Canadian Teachers’ Federation President’s Forum and on July 9, 2013 students who engaged in activities emanating from this organization spoke with impact (see UStream presentations at [www.ctf-fce.ca/Events/?index\\_id=121317&lang=EN&id=92109](http://www.ctf-fce.ca/Events/?index_id=121317&lang=EN&id=92109)). Many of these youth, supported by their teachers, reflected on their experiences of forming authentic relationships with various Indigenous communities. The students had the opportunity to learn the history of Indigenous peoples and visit First Nations in an exchange environment format. The voices of these students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) reinforced the power of relationships, based in principles of mutual understanding and trust, as key to social justice movements that are long lasting (Richards & Scott, 2009).

Fundamental to social justice is the recognition that inter-agency collaborations are also effective in confronting inequity and providing comprehensive solutions. Strategies aimed at reducing poverty, addressing limited access to services, building capacity in Indigenous communities and fostering understanding are foundational to this approach (Vancouver/ Richmond Health Board, 1999). International examples of these collaborations can be taken from other Indigenous Nations and examining what works and what doesn’t. For example, strategies at improving educational outcomes for Maori and Aborigine students, driven by the communities, can provide insights into our Canadian context (New South Wales Aboriginal Consultative Group Incorporated & New South Wales Department of Education and Training, 2004). The Maori have wise practices of how inter-agency collaborations are necessary and can have positive results for Indigenous peoples, thus affecting Indigenous students’ success.

Maori scholar Graham Smith (2003) advocates for six principles of change that are critical to the forming of inter-agency collaborations. The following points represent the underlying philosophy that participants would need to engage and proceed in:

- Respecting the right of Indigenous self-determination,
- Legitimizing Indigenous cultural identity, aspirations and goals,
- Incorporating culturally preferred pedagogy in education and other structures,
- Mediating socio-economic difficulties by building capacity (i.e. graduates, businesses, infrastructure),
- Affirming the cultural concept of planning for the collective vs. the individual (and always seven generations ahead), and,
- Participating in the shared vision of Indigenous communities dreams for restoration and reconciliation (i.e. improving risk factors as listed in the social determinants of health).

In a Canadian context, *Figure 2 - A Summary of Select Wise Practices in Canada*, highlights the programs, conditions and factors for unique collaborations resulting in Indigenous student success and ultimately Indigenous community capacity building.

Non-traditional partnerships focused on social justice and led by Indigenous peoples will honour Indigenous students and communities. Developing relationships and gaining a broader view of the educational landscape of Indigenous students is at the heart of it all. Investigating strategies, programs and collaborations that facilitate student success in areas of mental health (i.e. Morrissette, 2003), literacy (i.e. Ball, 2009; Eady, 2006), technology/e-learning (i.e. Kawalilak, Wells, Connell & Beamer, 2012), access initiatives (i.e. Miner, 2011; Popovic, 2011) and curriculum integration (i.e. Toulouse, 2008) are beginning points of discussion. Solutions arising from this collective inquiry need to be framed in creative ways and funding cannot be cited as the only barrier to change. After all, transformation for Indigenous student success requires more than just fiscal stability; it begins with our willingness and commitment first.

### Figure 2 - A Summary of Select Wise Practices in Canada

This figure is a summary of factors that contributed to Indigenous student success.

Sharing Our Success: Ten Cases in Aboriginal Schooling	Creating Conditions for FNMI Success in Simcoe County	The Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative (MAEI)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• strong leadership and governance</li> <li>• high expectations for students</li> <li>• focus on academic achievement</li> <li>• welcoming education climates</li> <li>• respect for local Indigenous cultures</li> <li>• quality professional development</li> <li>• provision of wide range of programs/services</li> </ul> <p>(Bell, Anderson, Fortin, Ottman, Rose, Simard &amp; Spencer, 2004)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• respectful and raised profile of Indigenous students</li> <li>• addressing academic and professional knowledge gaps</li> <li>• connections with communities</li> <li>• involvement of Indigenous child &amp; youth workers</li> <li>• hiring of specialized Indigenous resource teachers</li> <li>• culturally appropriate curriculum and spaces</li> <li>• awareness and promotion of Indigenous protocols</li> </ul> <p>(Haig-Brown Research &amp; Consulting, 2009)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• sharing of promising practices in education</li> <li>• models schools research and projects</li> <li>• valuing traditional knowledge and self-determination</li> <li>• youth entrepreneurship programs with businesses</li> <li>• accounting and banking mentorships</li> <li>• facilitating diverse connections and collaborations</li> </ul> <p>(MAEI, 2013)</p>

# HONOURING INDIGENOUS CONTRIBUTIONS

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Hockey, basketball, lacrosse, canoes, kayaks, dogsleds, axes, pulleys, saws, asphalt, compasses, mirrors, anesthetics, diuretics, ephedra, cataract removal, nursing, skin grafts, smelting, ironwork, chocolate, potato chips, food colouring, mouthwash, toothbrushes, tax systems, apartment complexes, insulation, stonemasonry, seawalls, urban planning and dreamwork psychology are only a few of the innovations that Indigenous people gave to the world (Keoke & Porterfield, 2002). 500 distinct Nations living on Turtle Island, also known as North America and the Meso-Americas, in geographical locations that supported their traditions and worldview. At the time of contact (approximately 1492) there were one hundred twenty million (120 000 000) Indigenous people living on the land. Each of these 500 unique Nations had their own languages, way of life and inventions.

Settlement in the Americas by non-Indigenous Nations resulted in a complex history that is marked by periods of friendship, survival, celebration, devastation, conflict, peace and genocide. Relocation to reserves, death by war, succumbing to disease and enacting of colonial legislation nearly decimated Indigenous people. In fact, by the late 1900's, it is estimated that 95% of the original Indigenous population had been wiped out (Toulouse, 2011). This resulted in the extinction of entire groups of Indigenous Nations (i.e. Beothuk). At the same time laws were created to limit Indigenous peoples ability to travel across their lands and to quash their attempts to patent any of their innovations. In Canada, First Nations were not legally allowed to vote until the 1960's and were not legally entitled to legal representation (considered wards of the Crown) until a decade earlier (Toulouse, 2011). Much of the traditional knowledge and gifts of the people was forced to go underground, or, unfortunately was lost or altered altogether.

Honouring the contributions of Indigenous Nations is paramount to the success and engagement of Indigenous students, parents/guardians and the communities (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2007). Nearly every province and territory in Canada has a dedicated Ministry/Department and subsequent policy framework that focuses on Aboriginal (FNMI) education. The Canadian Teachers' Federation also has its own body of research, networks, forums and recommendations that are centred around Indigenous student achievement and capacity building of communities. There are many lessons to be learned on how to plan and facilitate educational settings that are Indigenous inclusive. The first pivotal step is to go to the Indigenous Nations themselves and build an authentic foundation of trust (Association of Canadian Community Colleges, 2010).

This foundation and areas for consideration are further illustrated in Figure 3 – Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Into Classrooms. This represents a selection of key areas for consideration when planning for Indigenous student success with the communities.

Anishinaabek, Mushkegowuk, Onkwehonwe, Métis, Gitksan, Tsilhqot'in, Heiltsuk, Arapaho, Chickasaw, Fox, Hopi, Kiowa, Micmac, Olmec, Penobscot, Ute, Wyandot and the Inuit (deriving from their four Arctic regions of Nunatsiavut, Nunavik, Nunavut and Inuvialuit) are only a few of the many Indigenous Nations that live on Turtle Island. Self-identification by these Nations is critical to the honouring of Indigenous contributions in schools. Engaging in an inclusive process means that the visibility of local Nations is respectfully represented in school culture; greetings, class activities, celebrations, culminating tasks, publications, professional development, planning, representation and resources (Ningwakwe Learning Press, 2013). Each ministry, department and/or board entrusted with Indigenous students has the task of establishing equitable programs and practices

that support wholistic student achievement<sup>5</sup>. The foundation of which is based in increased self-esteem, the recognition of diverse Nations within classroom walls and the facilitation of culturally competent staff and peers (TVO Parents, 2011).

Honouring Indigenous contributions is a challenge that we will have to respectfully address and it is absolutely necessary for critical knowledge exchanges to occur. This exchange will be a process where we learn to humble ourselves by acknowledging our own limited knowledge of Indigenous peoples. It is also a way where we will learn to build stronger educational foundations for all students. To honour the gifts of Indigenous peoples is to validate the experiences of Indigenous students in school. And this in itself is a step towards building trust and meaningful connections.

**Figure 3 - Incorporating Indigenous Knowledge Into Classrooms**

This figure highlights areas to pursue when initiating inclusive practices that honour Indigenous worldview.



5 Wholistic student achievement refers to comprehensive planning of a balance of physical, emotional/mental, intellectual and spiritual activities in schools and classrooms.

# BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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“If the results are the same, be the difference...” (M. Simon, Personal Communication, July 8, 2013)

Self-governance and self-determination permeate the contemporary discourse of Indigenous politics; especially where land claims, constitutional reform and educational dis/achievement (residential schools, attrition rates) are concerned (Fallon & Paquette, 2012). Often these terms cause unease (typically rooted in a lack of understanding) in the general Canadian population. However, the right to decide and fully participate in the direction and quality of one’s life has become a contested space (both positive and negative) in the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Relationships are the grounding element in fostering educational change for Indigenous students. The engagement of parents/guardians, communities, leaders, cultural resource people and other critical stakeholders connected to Indigenous students is key. These relationships require care, truthfulness and protocols that are culturally appropriate (James, 2012). Difficult discussions on Indigenous rights and the history of colonialism will be a part of this process. However, these conversations cannot be the only living issues that frame an educational change narrative.

So, how do we build relationships with Indigenous students, Elders, Métis Senators, Indigenous organizations, families and communities? What steps do we need to take towards collaboration and reciprocity? Why is the principle of trust central in these connections? This section of *Beyond Shadows* will examine the conditions and select wise practices that have worked and are working today.

## Indigenous Students

Walker, Mishene & Watt (2012-2013) identified five tenets of what constitutes a “welcoming environment” (p. 3) for Indigenous students:

- Cultural and language based curriculum and professional development that is transparent in the activities of staff at school.
- Integration of Indigenous content with cross-curricular instructional opportunities where all students are taught this as core knowledge.
- Connections with the Indigenous community by opening up school facilities for extra-curricular events.
- Practicing cultural proficiency by having a diversity of Indigenous resources in the library and experiential learning applications.
- Meaningful relationships between Indigenous students and their teachers that are based in authenticity and real life conversations.

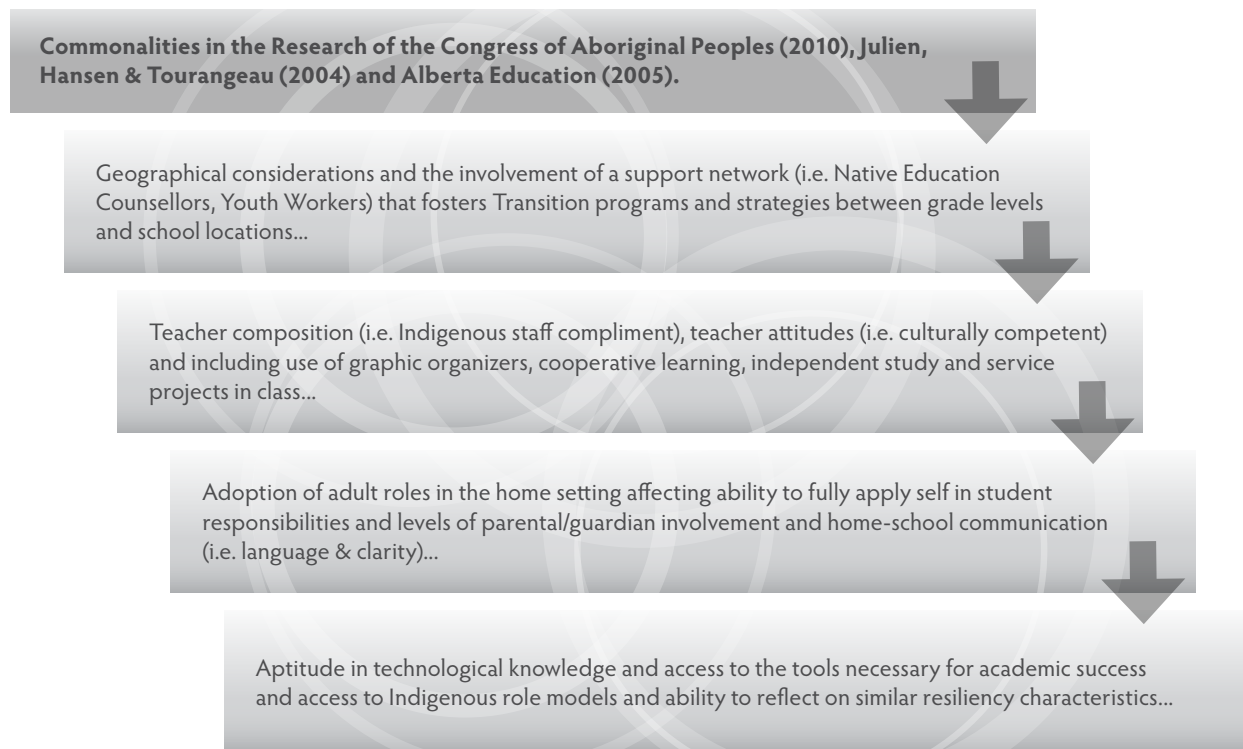
The preceding points are fully supported with examples practiced within Lakehead Public Schools (Thunder Bay, Ontario). These findings are also echoed within the health and wellness research of engaging Indigenous youth as conducted by Crooks, Chiodo and Thomas (2009) and Indigenous literacy success in the western Arctic as written by Robinson (2009).



In *Figure 4 – Identification of Indigenous Student Engagement Factors*, an introduction to the variety of interconnections necessary for the achievement of this state are displayed.

#### Figure 4 – Identification of Indigenous Student Engagement Factors

This figure highlights the unique dynamics that contribute to Indigenous student success.



#### Indigenous Parents/Guardians

“Parents are the first and primary educators of their children. As such, schools and school systems exist to support the child-rearing and education efforts of parents in a mutually beneficial partnership.” (Schmold, 2011, p.25)

Indigenous parents/guardians entrust educators with their children and this responsibility should be embraced as a gift in the teaching/learning journey. Engaging the parents/guardians will require patience, time, consistency and understanding (James, 2012). Their voice, input and contributions are critical to student success and the building of capacity in the communities. Each school requires a comprehensive parent/guardian partnership/ involvement plan that is written for parents (i.e. in accessible language and in a preferred language) and is respectful of the place of residence (i.e. may have to provide transportation for parents OR may have to go the community/home). The Alberta School Boards Association in the report written by Schmold (2011) lists these select activities from their membership as essential to affirming the school environment as culturally safe for parents/guardians and their children:

- Legacy Room Interpretive Programs where cultural resources (i.e. crafts and visual history by grade level) can be accessed. (p. 20)
- History in the Hills experiences where the classroom is taken to Indigenous archeological sites and led by the teachings of First Nations and Métis peoples. (p. 20)



- Indigenous representation in the governance and structure of the school boards that informs policy and practice in classrooms. (p. 21)

In *Our Words, Our Ways* (Alberta Education, 2005) Indigenous parents/guardians offer advice to other parents in how to be a partner in their child’s education. This list is a series of meaningful insights that range from practical advice like “...read the school newsletters” (p. 167) to powerful statements like “...come to the school-the school belongs to your child” (p. 167). The concept of sharing the responsibility of education is clear and the strategies within this document are models to follow and share.

## Indigenous Communities

Elders, Métis Senators, Traditional Knowledge Keepers, craftsmen/women, business owners, leadership (elected and traditional) and extended definitions of family comprise an Indigenous conceptualization of community. Each student’s situation and location will be different; however, it is critical to uncover the significant connections that he/she has in their lives. These are the individuals and groups that can impact student success effectiveness. Engagement of these stakeholders is therefore invited, valued and required. In *Figure 5 – Indigenous Communities as Partners in Education*; key strategies, principles and practices for engagement in Indigenous student success are illustrated.

### Figure 5 – Indigenous Communities as Partners in Education

This figure provides an overview of effective engagement principles, strategies and practices.

#### Overall Principles for Engagement = Trust + Time + Respect. This means to:

1. Be open to participating in respectful conversations focused on experiences of Indigenous resiliency. Engaging in dialogues and circles are possibilities (Tousignant & Sioui, 2009).
2. Be informed by investigating research on Indigenous student success, model schools and cultural curriculum. Embracing self as reflective practitioner (James & Renville, 2012).
3. Be flexible to Indigenous priorities in education and the community. Seek ways to integrate these priorities, especially when considering factors affecting assessment of students (Claypool & Preston, 2011).

#### Community Specific Strategies and Practices

- Become involved in the activities, events and celebrations of your local Indigenous Nation (McCallum, 2013).
- Establish creative ways to be visible by using social media or joining a community social media network.
- Gather information on the community through a variety of resources (online stats, peers, other). Broaden your view (Garafolo, 2012).

#### Elders/Métis Senators Specific Strategies and Practices

- Learn basic greetings, sayings and terms in the local language when approaching cultural resource people. Understand that language embodies worldview (Austin, 2008).
- Familiarize self with protocols of approaching cultural resource people and requesting a service. Some may require tobacco as a ‘good way’ to begin (Toulouse, 2013).
- Recognize that cultural resource people provide an experience that cannot be replicated by the majority of teachers. Their stories and skills are unique (McKeough, Bird, Tourigny, Romaine, Graham, Ottman & Jeary, 2008).

## **Indigenous Organizations**

Risk factors such as poverty, food security, childcare, housing, unemployment and health/wellness challenges are potential barriers to Indigenous student success (Pin & Rudnicki, 2011). Social support and belonging is also a primary issue that Indigenous students and their families face. This is why networking with Friendship Centres, Native Counsellor Associations, Political/Territorial Organizations, Indigenous Research Centres, Indigenous Businesses and Aboriginal Health Access Centres is pivotal. Awareness of these Indigenous organizations and the services/resources they provide can mean the difference between an Indigenous student succeeding or not. Friendship Centres provide a place of security and cultural connection in urban settings. Native Counsellor Associations can be that link to emotional and financial foundations in remote areas. And Aboriginal Health Access Centres can provide a place of culturally safe healthcare in multiple locations. Planning for these potential risk factors and linking with the appropriate organization is a fundamental step in the wholistic success of Indigenous learners in classrooms today (British Columbia Teacher's Federation, 2012).

# TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND INDIGENOUS INCLUSION

The inclusion of Indigenous content, in terms of diversity of resources and effectiveness of planning, ultimately comes down to the preparation and dedication of teachers (Maxwell, 2010). The knowledge of educators who work in environments that are dedicated to inclusion and equity is critical. Administrators and boards that have a strong commitment to the success of Indigenous students, as explicitly stated in plans and policies, are also factors in the support of teachers (Peace River School Division, 2010). Smith (2004) captures this process of transformative educational change in the statement "...there is a need to move beyond mere description[s] of [Indigenous] problems and issues to making sure that change does in fact occur..." (p. 52). *Figure 6 – Teacher Contributions Captured* represents select knowledge and pedagogy emerging from classrooms that honour Indigenous students and communities. The recognition and application of practices that work as identified by educators are key.

## Figure 6 – Teacher Contributions Captured

This figure represents current insights from various research projects on Indigenous student success and the impact of teachers.

### The Importance of Valuing Teacher Knowledge

- "...the northern teacher has an added responsibility to know and understand not only the historical significance of education for Aboriginal communities but also to know and understand contemporary social, political and economic realities. These teachers are also learners, engaged in a process of coming to know and understand a new way of teaching, of learning and of living..." (Burleigh & Burm, 2012, p. 23)
- Appreciating different conceptions of citizenship, creating educational environments that foster belonging, incorporating stewardship of the earth as learning objectives and the nurturing of meaningful roles in the schools are practices that teachers identify with... (Deer, 2010)
- "...although teachers may have grown up in families that exhibited ethno- or Euro-centric attitudes...towards Aboriginal peoples, some teachers are clearly reflecting on those past experiences and are questioning those beliefs...paus[ing] and reflect[ing] on who they are and what impacts they have on their Aboriginal students...professional development programs have heightened teachers' awareness to the point that many do not want to bring these biases...[or]...assumptions...into their teaching practices and are actively questioning what they have been doing or practising..." (Korteweg, 2010, p.16-17)
- Knowing the students, enhancing self-concepts/self-esteem, facilitating positive interpersonal communications and humanizing social studies (and other subject areas) with Indigenous worldview are practices teachers recognize... (Ottman & Pritchard, 2010)

## Learning from Indigenous Teachers in Canada.

St. Denis (2010) conducted one of the most comprehensive research studies on the experiences and professional knowledge of Indigenous teachers. The themes emerging from this research addressed the importance of lived teaching philosophies as directly connected to Indigenous teachers staying in the profession. While there were and continue to be many barriers to Indigenous teacher retention, the voices of these incredible educators were strong in their messages of making a difference in student's lives. Wise practices on how to integrate Indigenous content into mainstream curriculum in systems designed for assimilation were insightful. The heightened awareness for immediate systemic change is reflected in this teacher quote, "[we] are beyond popsicle stick teepees and dream catchers...we need to think outside of the box" (p. 36).

Combatting racism in the profession through the building of allies (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) is presented as critical to a mass transformation towards cultural competency in schools (St. Denis, 2010; Wimmer, Legare, Arcand & Cottrell, 2009). The retention of Indigenous teachers and ultimately Indigenous students is reliant upon meaningful connections and role models. In *Figure 7 – Characteristics of Authentic Allies*, Indigenous teachers identified the values that a genuine ally demonstrated in their relations.

### Figure 7 – Characteristics of Authentic Allies

This figure summarizes the attributes that allies in education possess and demonstrate in a committed anti-racist stance.



One of the anti-racist approaches to also invest in is collaboratively generated teacher guides that outline classroom strategies, written in clear accessible language, on how to respectfully include Indigenous presence in schools (Baxter, 2007; Hampton & Roy, 2002). There are many transparent and accountable models and examples in Ontario schools to consider (see Lakehead Public Schools & Simcoe County District School Board).

Recommendations that emerged from the work of St. Denis (2010) are consistent with the research on factors that support Indigenous student success. The following points are definitive priorities for educational leaders, policy makers, administrators, ministries, boards and educators to engage in:

- Select, train, hire and actively seek to retain more Aboriginal teachers. (p. 70)
- Teach Aboriginal content throughout the school, in all subjects, every day. (p. 70)
- Offer mentoring to Aboriginal teachers, helping them learn how to negotiate the system and how to maintain a reasonable workload. (p. 70)
- Require training and/or course work in Aboriginal education [all staff]. (p. 70)
- Acknowledge and utilize local resources. (p. 70)
- Provide opportunities for Aboriginal teachers to network with each other. (p. 70)

Embedding Indigenous inclusive practices is dependent upon a variety of factors. However, the development of teacher knowledge in culturally affirming pedagogy is a significantly valued approach. Honouring Indigenous teachers through legitimizing their experiences with a variety of collaborative opportunities also is in the direction of positive change.

# INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IS CANADIAN EDUCATION

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Canadians have been denied the right to learn the truth about the diversity and beauty of the First Peoples of Canada. Pushed to the margins and pushed to the confines of intellectual omission/revision of history is the Indian Education most citizens received<sup>6</sup>. Indigenous peoples have continually fought for their right to be involved in their children's education and be represented in school curriculum in an equitable and authentic manner. Corbiere (2000) reinforces this position when he states, “[a] positive image of Native people should be derived from the people's notion of positive identity...[this] usually means using the group's language, customs, and knowledge, as well as telling history from their perspective” (p. 2). The Canadian Teachers' Federation and its membership have a demonstrated commitment to this form of transformative educational change. It is echoed in various recommendations, policies, working groups, research pieces, networking/exchange forums and supported with planned action.

So, is Indigenous education a Canadian education? What does this look like in classrooms today? The pedagogy and practices that honour Indigenous learners also compliment their peers in schools. Interactivity, assessment for/as learning, experiential opportunities, character education, commitment to the environment, wholistic approaches to teaching, differentiated instruction, parental/guardian involvement, community engagement, hands-on activities, the use of exemplars, inquiry based projects, consistent/safe classroom leadership (i.e. procedures & routines), technology, scaffolding and student centred learning goals (i.e. clear success criteria and descriptive feedback) are some of the strategies that are identified as effective for Indigenous students (Ball, 2007; School District #73 Kamloops/ Thompson, 2012; Toulouse, 2011). These approaches are also reflected in the literature regarding factors that contribute to overall student success in equitable school systems.

The inclusion of Indigenous resources (i.e. text, video, online, human, geographical, manipulatives) and worldview (i.e. philosophies, traditions, language, contributions, stories, intellectual currency) within the curriculum is also vital to a meaningful Canadian education (Bartel, 2011; Cheney, 2002; Cook, 2006). Understanding treaties and the constitutional rights of Indigenous Nations in Canada is also an integral component of this form of educational content (Tupper & Cappello, 2008). This type of curriculum and pedagogy needs to be integrated as common knowledge from Kindergarten to Grade twelve. It provides an awareness that is greatly needed in a time where Indigenous Nations are calling for action, and allies to these many Nations are responding. Indigenous content and preferred strategies need to be developed and monitored in partnership with educators. The responsibility for Indigenous student success is a shared and collaborative one.

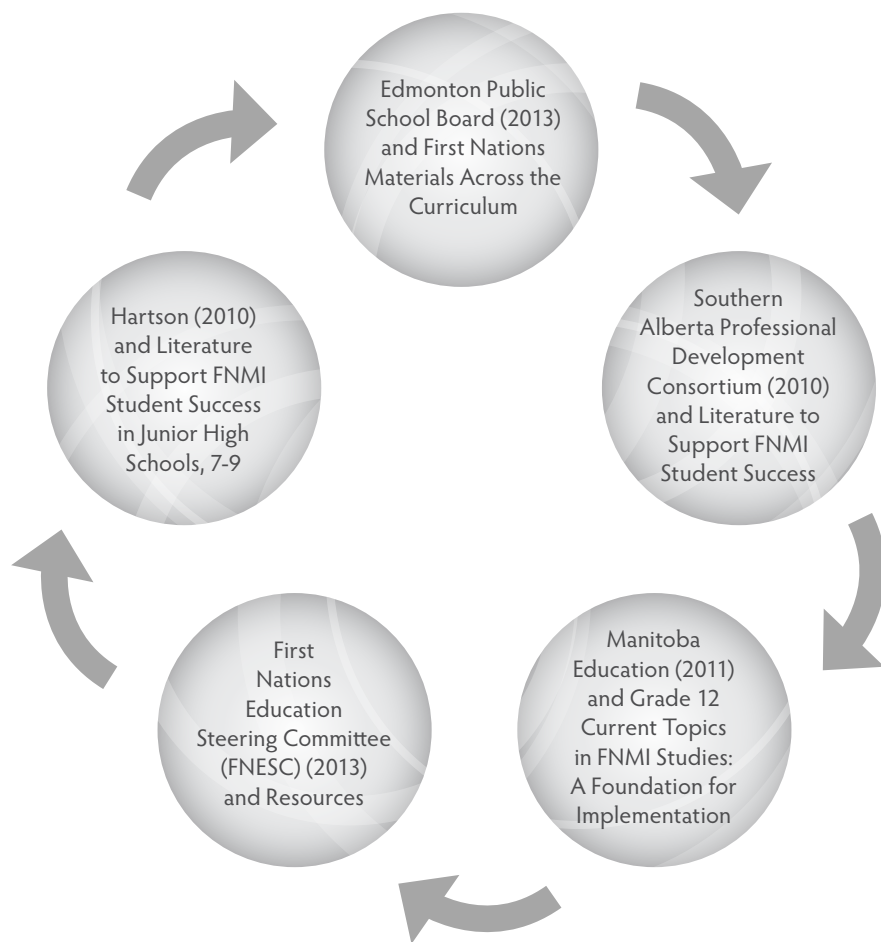
In *Figure 8 – Indigenous Resources in Canadian Schools*, select practices are identified. Please note that this is not meant to be an exhaustive list. Every province, territory, board and school has its own respectful resources. However, the showcasing of particular features of these resources are wise practices to be reflected upon.

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6 Indian Education is a term that captures the approach and stereotypical information that was transmitted about Indigenous peoples in Canada.

## Figure 8 – Indigenous Resources in Canadian Schools

This figure identifies particular Indigenous resources in Canada that provide opportunities for inclusion in mainstream classrooms.



First Nations Materials Across the Curriculum (2013) is an online curriculum lab that is teacher friendly, practical and accessible. There are links to Indigenous resources by subject area (i.e. art, health, social studies, language arts, science), access to other search engines that house Indigenous materials and clear advice on how to infuse Indigenous content into mainstream classrooms. Hartson’s (2010) document on FNMI Literature in Grades 7 to 9 is a series of critical thinking lessons and activities that form a comprehensive learning cycle (i.e. unit). This unique document lists culturally and linguistically rich books, considerations and cautions for educators and criteria for evaluating the cultural competency of all Indigenous resources. Manitoba Education (2011) begins its resource (Grade 12 Course on Current Topics in FNMI Studies) with a conceptual framework based on the wholistic medicine wheel. It describes the resource within this Indigenous teaching and frames it in a respectful manner. The package itself has a series of challenging activities that are complete with visual organizers for immediate classroom delivery. The Southern Alberta Professional Development Consortium (2010) has created a diverse list of FNMI literature and potential lessons for the early primary division. It is very clear in terms of the Nation what the resource is about and the opportunities for linking with other curriculum areas (i.e. integration). And finally, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (2013) has a website that provides authentic information, links, resources and professional development opportunities on how to honour Indigenous students in the classroom.

# SHARING OUR GIFTS: TRUTH AND HUMOUR

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“...[being an ally is] being genuine [and] not telling Aboriginal teachers just what they want to hear... I want people to be honest with me. I want people who have integrity...” (St. Denis, 2010, p. 51)

Debwewin is the Ojibwe word for truth. It is a verb that refers to living your life in connection with the seven goodlife teachings (i.e. respect, love, humility, wisdom, bravery, honesty, truth). It requires individuals to be reflective in their relationships and impacts on the world. It also requires individuals to think about the good of seven generations yet unborn. I have been very fortunate in my life to be surrounded by many good teachers in formal and non-formal settings. My parents, grandparents and extended family have taught me how important it is to honour and share your gifts with the world. They also reinforced that it is equally important to honour the gifts that others bring to this world. I was born into an Ojibwe/Odawa family in a First Nation in Northern Ontario called Sagamok Anishnawbek. I was always taught to be proud of who I am and where I come from. Nationhood, traditions and the valuing of education for community growth continue to be some of the key teachings alive in my experiences today.

Sharing our gifts in the spirit of truth; whilst embracing humour and positive interactions are vital to moving forward in Indigenous student success. We need to share the teachings of our people, establish meaningful relations, proceed with respect and reciprocity and advocate for human rights as essential to schooling (Vancouver Board of Education, 2008). The Aboriginal Education Research Committee (2010) validates the preceding statement by focusing on the gifts that Indigenous students bring to the classroom. Their research illuminates the successes of Indigenous students as framed within their own narratives and voices. “A strong sense of family and cultural identity...belonging...[rooted in] friendships, learning with and from peers, [and] caring student/teacher relationships” (p. 47) with concrete examples of Indigenous knowledge in the curriculum are cited as contributing to their retention in schools. These same principles are echoed by students and teachers participating in Project of Heart across Canada.

Indigenous worldview is a gift that is based in time-immemorial understandings of the earth. It is embedded with diversity and uniqueness in terms of languages, traditions, ceremonies and innovations (Toulouse, 2008). What ties these diverse 500 Nations together is the value of respect. Respect for each other and the fostering of the goodlife for all children. In Figure 9 – Select Indigenous Education Initiatives, a presentation of wise practices that foster educational access and equity for Indigenous peoples is highlighted.

Each of these preceding programs honours the gifts that Indigenous students, parents/guardians and the communities bring to equitable education environments. Infused within each of these programs are theoretical underpinnings directly related to anti-racism and advocacy with authentic allies literature (St. Denis, 2007; Wyrostok & Paulson, 2000).

“Aboriginal Nations currently face some of the most devastating effects of environmental destruction in Canada.” (Simpson, 2002, p. 14)

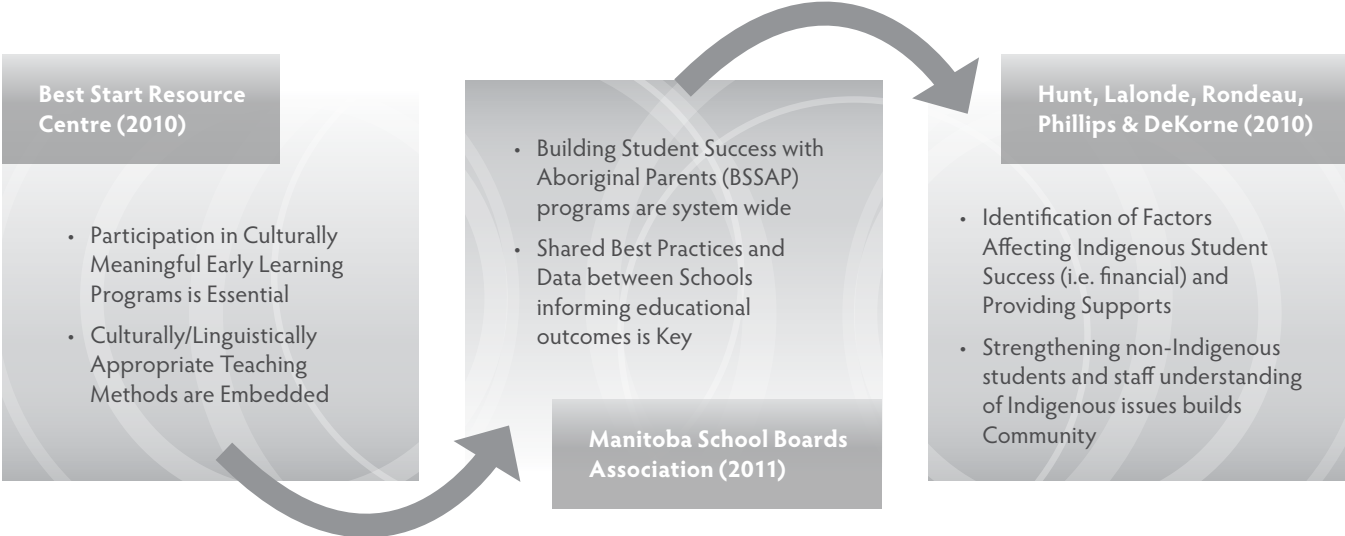
The immediacy of action in transformative educational change is not just for Indigenous peoples. It is rooted in a shared responsibility with Canadians who are concerned with social justice, stewardship, healing and leaving an earth that our future generations can be proud of (Simpson, 2002). Many of the answers to these issues will be



generated together in a collective movement that refuses to be silent. Our children and their children deserve a life that is worthy of them. Indigenous peoples cannot be pushed to the margins of society and called on only when it is convenient. The time is now to be a part of change that results in all students having access to education, health, wellness, socio-economic stability, positive self-esteem and cultural pride (Norris, 2011). Sharing our gifts based in relationships of truth, trust and action are what our children in schools require of us now.

**Figure 9 – Select Indigenous Education Initiatives**

This figure identifies the unique features of particular Indigenous educational programs in Canada that contribute to student success.





# Excerpt from LNU AND INDIANS WE'RE CALLED

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by Rita Joe (1932-2007)

At age seven  
I go to school  
The teacher is talking  
I do not understand much of what he says  
So my stubby pencil makes contact  
With a scrap of paper  
I print small words,  
The ones I know,  
I try to put them in order.

“Bring that paper here,” the teacher yells.  
Timidly I walk, my knees trembling  
I hand him the paper.  
His eyes widen, “Where did you find these?”  
I point at myself, my head, my heart...

(New Brunswick Public Library Service, n.d.)

Elder Gordon Williams at the July 2013 Canadian Teachers’ Federation President’s (CTF) Forum so eloquently challenged the audience to be a part of creative change in improving outcomes, access and equity for and with Indigenous peoples. This change is absolutely necessary for Indigenous students to have broadened and wholistic success in schools. It is also critical to building bridges of understanding and cultural competency with non-Indigenous citizens. Further to this, CTF President Paul Taillefer in the same space, also opened a critical dialogue that challenged the federal government to meaningfully engage in “eradicating existing disparities in access to fundamental education, health, and child and family welfare services for Aboriginal families and communities [and] developing a comprehensive federal poverty reduction strategy for Canada in broad consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty.” (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2013, p. 1) These measures target the systemic barriers that exclude Indigenous students, peoples and their communities.

In conclusion, I can definitely say, as a teacher, researcher and most proudly an Ojibwe woman from Sagamok First Nation I accept the challenge posited by Elder Gordon Williams. I fully intend to do my part for Indigenous students in achieving their dreams and being proud of who they (we) are and continue to be. I also do this for non-Indigenous students who have the right to be enriched with the truth about Indigenous peoples. And so I proceed with a good mind and a good heart, ready to listen and ready to act.

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