

The Need to Redefine Success in Aboriginal Learning - Our Challenge

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Karihwakeron Tim Thompson,
President and CAO, FNTI
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How do we currently measure success?

- “We” are not the ones doing the measuring;
- First Nations, Metis and Inuit are not, with few exceptions, setting their standards of education and educational success;

Current Approaches....

- Do not focus on the spectrum of lifelong learning;
- Simply focus on the number of graduates or non-graduates from secondary school, and success on standardized tests;
- Research tends to be limited to identifying education deficits of FN's, Metis and Inuit peoples in the school system;

For example...

- In 2004 the Auditor General of Canada identified a 28 year achievement gap between First Nations students and Canadian students. Most disturbing, she noted that this gap was increasing.
- What is the base standard being used?
Graduation from secondary school.
- Graduation rates are also the primary measure utilized to measure success at the post-secondary level.

Why should this be a surprise?

- Formal schooling for Aboriginal peoples really began with an 1847 Report to the legislative assembly of Upper Canada by Egerton Ryerson, the father of the Canadian public school system.
- He noted that “The education of Indians consists not merely of training the mind but of a wearing of the habits and feelings of their ancestors and the acquirements of the language, arts and customs of civilized life.”
- Ryerson recommended the creation of “industrial” schools which would provide religious and agricultural education. This led to the implementation of the residential school system.

Sir John A. Macdonald, Prime Minister of Canada, 1887

- "The great aim of our legislation has been to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Amerindian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change."

Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs 1920

- "I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that the country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... That has been the whole purpose of Indian education and advancement since the earliest times... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill."

The Social Experiment continues...

- Until major amendments were made to the Indian Act in 1951, it was illegal for status Indians to attend post-secondary school. Indeed it was also illegal to hold ceremonial dances, festivals, or for Indians to organize.

Policy Change from Assimilation to Integration – not much difference

- 1951 Indian Act amendments
- 1960 Canadian Bill of Rights
- Leads to integration of First Nations students into mainstream schools.

1972 Indian Control of Indian Education

- Policy Paper calls for locally controlled education
- We now know this became interpreted as locally administered
- Led to growth in numbers of local First Nations operated schools

What is really being measured?

- "The harsh reality is that Ontario educational guidelines and standards are aimed at informing *their* citizens about *their* history, *their* civic responsibilities and *their* concepts of wealth, business and success. Their goals are not necessarily First Nations goals...**First Nations should educate their people in what it takes to be a first-class citizen of a First Nation, rather than becoming a second-class citizen to a foreign system.**"

Richard Hill Jr.: "First Nations Education Philosophy" in The New Agenda – A Manifesto for First Nations Education in Ontario, 2004

RCAP 1996

- "As provinces and territories move to implement Canada-wide testing of students, the goals of education embodied in such testing are defined by non-Aboriginal authorities. Some Aboriginal parents and communities may share these goals, but it should not be assumed that they will place them above their own goals for the education of their children. **Self-determination in education should give Aboriginal people clear authority to create curriculum and set the standards to accomplish their education goals.**

As First Nations, Metis and Inuit peoples how do we define success in learning?

First we need to identify what we mean by learning

- learning is a lifelong activity;
- learning is a gift for individuals and collectives;
- learning occurs everywhere, not just somewhere;
- Learning is interactive and experiential;
- Learning involves more than five senses;
- Learning is a continuum;
- Learning informs the choices we make;

Elements which are important to us

- Our languages – convey our worldview
- Our identities - creation, migration
- Our oral histories
- Our intellectual traditions
- Survival skills – Indigenous professions
- Our social roles and societal structures
- Our relationships to the natural world and other nations

The Draft Model Before Us

- Proposes to consider a lifelong learning perspective
- Proposes to incorporate “formal” and “experiential” learning
- Demonstrates the linkages to the development of our communities and nations
- Is a paradigm shift from the assimilation/integration approach

Our Challenge

- Ultimately to identify key measurable indicators of learning which impact individual and collective well-being throughout the lifelong learning spectrum.

Why Do This?

- Because we should
- Because we can
- Because someone else will if we don't