

GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP AS A COROLLARY OF DECOLONIZATION



Dr. Margaret Brigham, Dean of the Institute for Global Citizenship and Equity

Preparing students to effectively function in the 21st century is one of the challenges of higher education. It is not enough to acquire the language and culture of the mainstream. In *Red Pedagogy* (2004) critical educator Sandy Grande who is Quechua, suggests that what has long passed as “mainstream” education is actually white stream education. The marginalizing of groups occurs whenever members are unable to function effectively in their own cultural community, the national civic culture, and increasingly in a diverse global society (Banks, 2003).

Reversing the trend of assimilation ideologies of the past, this paper will examine the concept of global citizenship as a corollary of decolonization, especially for Aboriginal students and other identifiably marginalized groups. Citizens in this century need the knowledge, attitudes, and skills required to function in their own communities and beyond their own cultural borders (Banks, 2003). Global citizenship has potential for challenging

inequities while expanding opportunities in postsecondary education.

Emerging models of global citizenship education are concerned with the formal and informal relationships between individuals and the world in which they live, and the stratifications which exist in society. High on Canada’s research agenda are the participation and identity processes closely linked to the postsecondary education system. The purpose of this paper is to apply the global citizenship and inclusion approach to an Aboriginal case study. Demographics, barriers and obstacles and postcolonial concepts will be presented as well as equity program design principles for postsecondary educators.

Practical Application: The Aboriginal Context

Understanding why Aboriginal people are not participating in postsecondary education requires a reality check on the part of policymakers. A report on the status of research related to access and persistence in Canadian postsecondary education highlighted that “disentangling the barriers to access” is still somewhat limited (HEQCO, 2008). Contemporary issues and reality among Aboriginal people are directly tied into the Canadian government's residential school apology of June 11, 2008.

Harper's apology admitted that the residential school policy was wrong to try to "take the Indian out of the child". It was silent, however, on why churches, schools, and government

aligned in the first place to displace youth from their communities. At the root of the policy is the colonial project which had several stated objectives: assimilation, the obliteration of identity, the acquisition of Aboriginal land and resources, and a conceptual and physical locating of Aboriginal people on the margins of Canadian society.

Formal Education Structures and Human Relationships

Over the past decade, much attention has been directed to a gap in the postsecondary attainment of Aboriginal people. In 2004, 46% of the Canadian population (aged 15 to 44) held a postsecondary certificate, diploma, or degree, compared to 27% of the Aboriginal population of the same age group (OAG, 2004). Although the gap is shrinking, the educational attainment of young Aboriginal adults remains well below the levels achieved by their non-Aboriginal peers. In 2006, 68% of non-Aboriginal young adults (aged 25 to 34) held a post-secondary credential, compared to 42% of Aboriginal young adults (Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population).

A policy relevant statistic, the *gap* is evidence of a need for a more inclusive pedagogy, outreach strategies and collaborative human interventions. The responsibility for such initiatives among policy makers involved in Aboriginal postsecondary education is contentious at best. The federal government sees it as a "matter of social policy", while First Nations view it as an inherent Aboriginal and Treaty right recognized in the Canadian Constitution (No Higher Priority, 2007). It is against this backdrop that educators have an opportunity for leadership and accountability.

Colleges and universities are pivotal in closing the *gap* in Aboriginal completion rates. At the policy level, a number of tools are at their

disposal. Higher education policies known as access and the open door are designed to ensure equal opportunity for all Canadians. *Access* refers to the extent that special populations including Aboriginal students can enter and participate in Canada's postsecondary education system (CMEC, 2003). *Open Door* admission implies that postsecondary institutions will meet the wide ranging needs of students, thus providing equality in educational opportunity (Drea, 2003).

Aboriginal access to mainstream postsecondary education depends on how policymakers and practitioners approach the question "What happens when the players are not equal?" Aboriginal youth recently surveyed ----"have high educational aspirations with seven in 10 hoping to complete a postsecondary education" (EKOS, 2006). Yet, it is estimated that "only thirty two percent of Aboriginal children graduate from Grade 12 in First Nation schools" and that the provincial outcomes are no better (Assembly of First Nations Background Paper, 2004).

The backgrounds of Aboriginal learners exhibit major differences when compared demographically with Non-aboriginal students. For example:

- In 2004, a *typical Canadian college student* was 24 years old, female (61%), single (76%) with no children, and spoke English (82%) as her primary language (Canadian College Student Survey Consortium, 2005; Youth in Transition Survey, 2004).
- For the same time period, a *typical Aboriginal student* was 30 years old or more (44%), female (67%), married or in a long-term relationship with children, and English may not be her primary language (Brigham 2006).

Notably, being female is the one common characteristic shared between the two profiles.

Other variables offer insight into how colleges and universities can plan more effectively for program delivery and design. According to the statistical profile, Aboriginal students tend to be older, with family responsibilities, and often are speakers of languages other than English. Moreover, Aboriginal learners tend to delay entry into postsecondary after high school (HEQCO, 2008).

Researchers define “threshold access” as the access achieved by “walking through the door” of a postsecondary institute (Adelman, 2007). Conceptually, this gives rise to a need for a distinction to be made between equality and equity. *Equality* focuses on maintaining equal experiences for all students regardless of their backgrounds. *Equity* considers the diverse backgrounds that students bring with them to campus and provides experiences to enrich this diversity and address pre-existing gaps (Iseke-Barnes and Wane, 2006).

Systemic barriers can be either structural or procedural and prevent accessibility through laws, policies, or restrictions. Aboriginal youth are typically “out of school from one to four years, underprepared, and missing grade 12 English and Math” (Richardson & Blanchet-Cohen, 2000). Even graduating with a high school diploma does not ensure college readiness, since whether an Aboriginal student is equipped to attend college depends on the academic stream placement of the individual (Knowledge Matters, 2002). A *college or university admission policy* operates as a procedural barrier if it makes the assumption that Aboriginal students are as equally prepared as other applicants to participate in Canadian postsecondary education.

The Processes of Identity and Participation

Reframing and messaging are highlighted in this section as valuable tools for social analysis that offer insights into the processes of identity and participation. Additionally, they can be helpful in reforming past institutional practices regarding Aboriginal learners. Colonialism, according to Friere (2006) “occurs in the mind” of the colonizer and the colonized and must first be overcome in the interior mental spaces. In *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, Bolman and Deal (2008) explore the origins of what they call cluelessness and introduce “reframing” as an ability to think about situations in more than one way. Similar to the idea of a hidden curriculum, in *Language and Politics*, Joseph (2006) discusses the sending of “messages” through education systems operated by the nation state. Not surprisingly, studies from around the world show that minorities often experience powerlessness, intimidation, and a form of symbolic violence in postcolonial educational environments.

To fully grasp the hidden complexities of Canada’s postsecondary education system regarding Aboriginal learners, it is necessary to isolate the messages. For as Joseph (2006) asserts on the effect of messaging:

“Who controls the schools controls the past, . . . and shapes the future, by shaping, or even by failing to shape, those who will inhabit it.”

Two messages stand out as having significance for the purposes of this paper. One has to do with identity i.e. “You are a personal failure” and another is spoken when Aboriginal people seek participation i.e. “You are not worthy.” On

an anecdotal note, most Aboriginal learners who do successfully complete their postsecondary education somehow manage to cope with the profound negative impact of these messages.

Figure 1. Canada’s Postsecondary Education System

<p>IDENTITY MESSAGE</p> <p>Personal Failure vs. Failure of the System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mystification 	<p>PARTICIPATION MESSAGE</p> <p>Not worthy vs. Fixing the System</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obstacles & Pre-existing gaps
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Identity Message. Uncovering the first message can be accomplished by asking the question---
What is the message being conveyed to Aboriginal learners on Canada’s intrusion into their identity and marginalization?

In the case of Aboriginal people, impediments are “mystified” as personal failures rather than as failures of the system. The process makes it difficult for Aboriginal learners to critically understand their own situations. *Mystification* is the process whereby the oppressive and alienating features of a dominating culture are disguised and hidden (Freire, 1985). Educational policy research on Aboriginal postsecondary students consistently identifies major impediments as being economic, academic, personal matters, or a need for career and workplace information. It must be underscored, however, that educational systems and their affiliates function as the key instruments in disseminating mystifications.

Reframing Personal Failure. Colleges and universities that reject a blaming the victim perspective, are better positioned to increase Aboriginal participation. For example, the following rationale can be used to effectively reframe the “personal failure” message. In the emerging information society, an educated person is described as someone who considers learning as a lifelong process (Fischer, 1999). Lifelong learning is recognized as a federal and provincial policy focus and as a concept to describe community development and nation-building among Aboriginal peoples. Reflected by the *lifelong learning continuum*, is a view that learning occurs in stages throughout a person's life and that various transition points require special attention (Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable, 2004). Through culturally-based strategies, partnerships, and collaborations, institutions can expand the limits of experience allowing Aboriginal learners to reach their true potential.

Participation Message. Revealing the second message, which is hidden in plain sight, can be done by asking the question--- **What message is being transmitted to Aboriginal learners on their pre-existing gaps in college preparation and participation?**

In the case of Aboriginal people, obstacles and barriers are taken as evidence of shortcomings or not being worthy participants, rather than as a catalyst for fixing the system. *Obstacles* refer to a variety of conditions present in the lives of Aboriginal students that can seem overwhelming and make progress difficult. The major obstacles most often cited by Aboriginal postsecondary students in surveys include:

- Inadequate financial resources
- Poor academic preparation
- Family responsibilities
- Lack of student development services
- Isolation
- Exclusion
- Campus Climate

Reframing Not Worthy. Colleges and universities that view Aboriginal students as falling through the cracks are better positioned to assist in closing the gap in Aboriginal attainment. For example, the following rationale can be used to effectively reframe the “not worthy” message. Stepping stones to success for Aboriginal learners are needed to strengthen identity and allow movement on the lifelong learning continuum. Most educators agree that moving from high school to college or university is an important transition point for all students. For Aboriginal students it is a critical juncture where the past (high school performance and completion) meets the present (postsecondary entry requirements). Implicit in the delivery and design of equity oriented transition programs is

the idea that to be effective for learners, such strategies must address the pre-existing gaps (See Appendix A).

For policymakers and practitioners, this exercise represents a challenge to the existing paradigm in postsecondary education. Using a two-step thought process; one must first disentangle the message within a model of global citizenship and inclusion, and second view it as a catalyst for instituting change. As was demonstrated, the power of reframing lies in its potential to illuminate the hidden, thereby allowing Aboriginal learners to transcend the narrative of marginalization. And, most importantly, reframing has potential for changing the mindset of all stakeholders, including policymakers, researchers, educators, and Aboriginal learners. The operative question becomes one of “how do we communicate new messages”?

Meeting the Needs of Aboriginal Learners

Youth engagement strategies offer a starting point and often serve as a postsecondary pathway for marginalized groups. Partnerships with local school boards and communities produce creative outreach activities which can overlap with college entrance programs. At Centennial College, for instance, the youth engagement strategy is an umbrella for a variety of outreach, recruitment, and engagement programs.

The *typology of transition programs* that follows was synthesized from a review of over forty programs. It can be used to prompt discussion of the types of changes that will better address Aboriginal learner needs (Brigham, 2006). For each of the categories displayed in Figure 2, there is a brief description indicating who can benefit.

Figure 2. Typology of Aboriginal Transition Strategies

TYPE 1: ASSISTS WITH GENERAL ADMISSION

Access programs provide additional academic preparation and skills to students who do not meet the regular admission criteria.

TYPE 2: ASSISTS WITH PROGRAM ADMISSION

Preparatory programs help Aboriginal students qualify for entry to certificate, diploma, or degree programs. Each field of study or department sets the achievement levels and prerequisites required for admission.

TYPE 3: DESIGNATED SEATS

Designated seats sets aside a specific number for Aboriginal students who meet minimal program requirements, thus they do not have to compete with other applicants for program entry.

TYPE 4: ALTERNATIVE ADMISSION

Alternative admissions offer Aboriginal students an opportunity to request special consideration for provisional admission on an individual basis.

Type I strategies meet the needs of learners *seeking general admission*. The likely participants are Aboriginal high school graduates, adults, and out-of-school youth (with or without a diploma). Programs in this approach are flexible, aligned with the curriculum of the institutions offering them, and provide Aboriginal students with the support services needed for success. There is no one model acclaimed as the most effective, and the length of time varies from one semester to two years. Most do not include upgrading as part of the program, although it may be available on campus.

Some examples follow on typical offerings.

- Classes that build academic skills in research and study techniques, communications, math, computer applications, and career exploration.
- One-year of study that provides up to three first year classes and academic support in small, weekly workshops. Successful completion helps the student qualify for application to a degree program.
- One-year transition classes offered in the community and a coordinator to support students completing assignments. Helps student qualify for program admission and alternative program admissions policy.
- Two-year transition course in science and technology with academic support, small classes, and Aboriginal community involvement.

Type 2 strategies address the needs of learners *seeking program admission*. The likely participants are Aboriginal students unprepared for their chosen field of study. In this approach the programs are highly structured, based on competencies and prerequisites for specific fields of study, and enable Aboriginal students to qualify for admission. The length of time

needed to complete a program varies from one to two years.

Some illustrations follow on actual components.

- One-year of prerequisite courses in communications, math, and computer programming. Offers access to elders. Helps the student qualify for program admission into Computer Systems program.
- Two-year preparatory course in business foundations. Helps the student qualify for program admission to Bachelor of Business Administration, or to Bachelor of Commerce program.
- Two-year course that helps students complete high school equivalency requirements and nursing prerequisites. Some courses are taught in the Inuit language and include Inuit health beliefs and practices. Upon successful completion, students gain entry to nursing program.

The Type 3 and Type 4 strategies establish alternative admission policies and guidelines only.

All four types of Aboriginal-specific transition strategies offer opportunities for movement on the *lifelong learning continuum* and represent stepping stones to success for a vast majority of Aboriginal students. Some involve a joint venture between student services and academic departments; others are appended to Aboriginal Learning Resource Centers located on campus, while still others operate at least partially in First Nation, Inuit, and Métis communities. Rather than using the proverbial “cookie cutter” approach which is often done on the basis of available funding, colleges and universities are encouraged to increase Aboriginal participation by research and analysis of targeted groups and pre-existing gaps.

The Call to Action

1. Develop an institution wide strategic plan for Aboriginal participation that goes beyond “threshold access”.
2. Review admission policies, procedures, and actual practices to determine whether systemic barriers exist and operate to exclude Aboriginal students.
3. Institute a process for identifying Aboriginal learners.
4. Examine what the messages are, that are being transmitted to Aboriginal potential and current Aboriginal learners.
5. Determine whether those messages will position your institution to help Aboriginal students in achieving the goal of becoming a global citizen.
6. Utilize equity principles considering the diverse backgrounds of the learners, by providing experiences to enrich this diversity, and by addressing preexisting gaps.
7. Consult with the Aboriginal community frequently to build trust, receive feedback on your efforts, and to contribute new ideas that are culturally-specific to Aboriginal people.

Second, transformative principles and social analysis tools used in alignment with the global citizenship and inclusion approach are an effective methodology for drawing together theory, policy and institutional practice. One example is the demystification of the Aboriginal experience in education showing that Aboriginal learners are not personal failures, but survivors. Another is the equity lens focus on mitigating the effect of pre-existing gaps on Aboriginal learners through enhanced institutional accountability.

Finally, as stated succinctly in *Global Citizenship Education: Philosophy, Theory and Pedagogy*, the concept of global citizenship embodies a perspective of embracing inclusion, human rights, and multiculturalism in a critical and informed way (Peters et.al, 2008). For that reason, as was shown in this paper, active engagement with contemporary issues and realities is a necessity. Within postsecondary environments the model provides a powerful transformative paradigm for increasing access.

Conclusion

In his book, *The Location of Culture* (1994) postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha theorizes *interstitial space* as an in-between space providing the terrain for elaborating strategies of self-hood (singular or communal), initiating new signs of identity, and creating innovative sites of collaboration and contestation. Global citizenship as a corollary of decolonization invokes such a knowledge space, and it is one in which postsecondary educators must find the courage to work.

Pre-Existing Gaps & Aboriginal Learners

1. Financial Resources

- the cost of tuition, books and living expenses
- inadequate financial aid and level of government funding
- a lack of money
- poverty of Aboriginal communities
- a need to work at a paying job

2. Academic Preparation

- non-college vs. college track curricula streams
- the nature of the K-12 schooling system
- low expectations of Aboriginal students
- lack of college preparation at the high school level
- limited available resources at reserve and remote schools
- grades are not good enough

3. Family Responsibilities

- children, child care and family responsibilities
- a need to work to support a family
- expense of relocating a family
- difficulty in managing community ties and obligations

4. Student Development and Services

- lack of information on career choices, programs of study, and financial aid
- lack of counseling and advising support services on campus and in community
- lack of self-confidence and motivation, absence of role models who have postsecondary education experience

5. Isolation

- attitude that college is not part of the culture
- stress of relocating (finding housing, moving away from family, feeling unsupported)
- not feeling any ownership or control of the education process
- loss of interest or motivation
- distrust of education institutions (residential schools, assimilation)
- feelings of social discrimination (mainstream institutions, in mainstream society)
- concern over value of credential for jobs in First Nations

6. Exclusion

- experience of racism on campus
- discrimination experiences with the educational process
- low self-esteem, low skills development, and emotional barriers

7. Campus Climate

- no understanding of aboriginal culture on campus
- curriculum and programs ignore Aboriginal perspectives, values and issues
- courses fail to prepare students for the environments that they will be working in
- feeling that not welcome on university and college campuses

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