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Barriers Faced by Canadian Aboriginal Adults as They Return To Postsecondary School

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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

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Robert L. Campbell

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2016

Abstract

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Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Aboriginal people in Canada are less likely to complete postsecondary education than are non-Aboriginal people. This leads to increased rates of unemployment and poverty and the need for additional government supports for them. It also leads to missed opportunities for members of this group. The purpose of this project study is to identify and examine barriers faced by Canadian Aboriginal adult students as they return to school for postsecondary education. The conceptual framework for qualitative studies is based on the work of Ertmer (1999) that suggests barriers can be placed into two broad categories: extrinsic and intrinsic. This project study used a case study design with a purposeful sample from a local academic institution. Ten students were interviewed, 5 who successfully completed the college entrance program and 5 who were unable to complete the program. Each interview was held at a neutral location. The sample size allowed for in-depth exploration of barriers experienced by each participant. Substantive and theoretical coding was used for data analysis. Results were triangulated through interviews, observation, and document review. The project study is important as it may identify new barriers so institutions offering similar programs can put controls in place to increase the likelihood of academic success for local Aboriginal adults. Addressing the barriers for this population may contribute to positive social change by providing information as to what makes these students successful in their attempts at reentering school, moving on to postsecondary education, graduating, and becoming employed.

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Dedication

This project study is dedicated to my late father, my mother, my wife, and four daughters. Their love and support have inspired me to help people.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to thank my parents for their love and support throughout my life. They have taught me the importance of having a strong educational background as well as the value of family. I also extend my gratitude to my wife Wilma and my four daughters, Page, Sarah, Robyn, and Kaylee.

I thank the faculty of Walden University for their support and guidance throughout this process. They have helped to make my doctoral studies interesting and useful. I also want to thank my friends and colleagues for their understanding and encouragement towards seeking this degree. Their friendships are highly valued.

Table of Contents

i

List of Tables

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

The project study addressed the barriers Canadian Aboriginal students face when attempting to return to school. They experience many barriers to success, and often are forced to drop out of programs due to their circumstances. The purpose of this project study was to identify and examine those barriers. As an outcome of this study, I proposed a Professional Learning Community (PLC) as a way to work with teachers and counselors to help students overcome barriers as they face them and reduce the potential for them to drop out. Section 1 specifically identifies the problem. I discussed evidence of the problem at the local level and from current research literature. This section also addressed the significance of the problem and identified the guiding research questions. There is a review of literature that looked at the barriers that have previously been identified. This section ends with a review of the implications and the direction of the research study.

Definition of the Problem

At the time of this study, the Aboriginal population was one of the fastest growing populations in Canada, growing 45% between 1996 and 2006 while the non Aboriginal population only saw a growth of 8% (Statistics Canada, 2008; Human Resources Development Canada, 2012).

Preston (2008b) stated that over 50% of the Canadian Aboriginal population was under 30 years of age. There have been difficulties with the education of this population for many years (Hull, 2009). At the time of this study there was a problem related to the

weak education Aboriginal people received resulting in the difficulty they experienced as they entered any postsecondary educational institution (Nguyen, 2011). They often experienced low motivation, and became frustrated and fatigued with daily bus travel to and from school (Bird and McKinnon, 2004). These factors lead to them opting to leave mainstream education (Bird and McKinnon, 2004). Many of the people wanted to improve their lives by attending postsecondary institutions, however, because of their weak educational background and other issues they face as Aboriginal people, had difficulty gaining entry into a program (King, 2008; Preston, 2008b). If they were granted entry, then they had difficulty achieving a passing grade (Preston, 2008b). While the problem is framed to be specific to Aboriginal people, there are implications for Canadian society as a whole. By not addressing the educational needs of Aboriginal people, the fastest growing population in Canada, this could result in negatively impacting the prosperity of the entire Canadian population (Preston, 2008b).

The institution under study, originally founded in 1921, was a relatively small institution with less than 2,000 students. The University College Entrance Program (UCEP) was in its 26th year and had been very successful in assisting Aboriginal students move on to postsecondary education (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). On average, 70% of UCEP students successfully complete the program (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). The program was taught on the university campus with well-set up classrooms that made for a good learning environment (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). The program consisted of four main courses, biology, chemistry, math and English, all were taught over a single 8-month period

(Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). In order for candidates to complete the program, students had to attend classes regularly and needed to complete all four courses with a passing grade (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013).

The entry requirement (for UCEP program) for all students, Aboriginal or otherwise, was to pass an English and math entrance exam (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). Students who entered the program after passing both the exams would usually achieve success; however, some students, specifically of Aboriginal background regularly dropped out before the program was completed (S. Moffatt, personal communication, April 16, 2012). There appeared to be a number of factors involved in the success of a student that were not captured by simply having the students complete an entrance exam. Bird and McKinnon (2004) believed these students had great potential, but were leaving before completion due to barriers that were not clearly defined.

Relationship of Problem to Local Setting

In the past literature there were many barriers to Aboriginal education including historical, educational, social, financial, geographical, cultural and pedagogical (Preston, 2008b). With all of these barriers, it was important to develop an educational situation for these students in which the barriers were removed to enable learning to begin (Falasca, 2011). Many of the adults coming into school from this culture had many life experiences and had looked at the world through the unique lens of an Aboriginal person. Growing up on a reservation had left them surrounded by Aboriginal ways and beliefs; both positive and negative (Preston, 2008a, 2008b). This had likely produced meaning schemes or

attitudes and beliefs that were entrenched in who they were as they entered the classroom as an adult (Preston, 2008b).

Among reasons Aboriginal students were not successful at university and college study included, early pregnancy, part time employment, low self-esteem, poor educational background, little or no parental or community support, low motivation, issues with transportation, poor study skills, substance abuse, behavioral problems and peer pressures (Bird and McKinnon, 2004). As the Aboriginal population grows and the non Aboriginal population ages the problem will become increasingly important. If this population is not educated, they will become increasingly unemployable and a potential drain on public resources (Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010).

A better understanding of the factors that contribute to school success will help with the development of the necessary supports to improve program completion. The UCEP was housed within a university that served a large metropolitan city, but drew Aboriginal students from the northern third of the province, including rural and remote areas (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). A proportion of students traveled to the school each day while others resided in the city while attending school so understanding the factors that increase their probability of success are key to ensuring the move has positive benefits (Donavant, 2009; Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit, 2010).

Relationship beyond the local setting

Lower educational attainment among the Aboriginal population in Canada was not unique. Studies have shown this situation appears to be consistent with the experience

in the United States, Australia and New Zealand (Felton-Busch, Solomon, McBain, & De La Rue, 2009; Garvey & Grobe, 2011; Buckmiller, 2010).

This project study will add to the body of knowledge related to the advanced education of Aboriginal adults and will assist the university under study and other institutions in developing programs, which prevent these barriers from forcing students to drop out.

The treatment Aboriginal people have received from the government throughout history is an important issue associated with this project study (Preston, 2008b). There is an understanding that Aboriginal people usually do not reach high educational levels (Mendelson, 2006). Funding was available for some postsecondary study for Aboriginal people, but the funding for programs aimed at providing a bridge between past education and postsecondary readiness was eliminated in Canada (Price, & Burtch, 2010). Such funding would support skills development and provide Aboriginal adults with the tools required to enter the post-secondary stream. Aboriginal adolescents were more likely to have issues with alcohol and drug use and this contributed to a high dropout rate from junior and senior high school and created the need for educational upgrading or bridging programs (Mendelson, 2006). Schooling of this type provided individuals with the skills and information they may have missed due to dropping out of school at an early age or not completing grades required to allow them to move forward successfully (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). This educational deficit appeared to be increasing (Preston, 2008b).

The Aboriginal population was growing at a faster rate than other groups and if current barriers continued, there would continue to be an increase in the number of under educated Aboriginal people in Canada (Mendelson, 2006). These issues also exist in other countries, particularly the United States (Buckmiller, 2010). Preston (2008b) stated that the economic future of the Canadian population was dependent on the education of the Aboriginal population and their entry into the workforce.

At the local level, the level dealing with the community of Aboriginal people, it appeared there had been a growing feeling of inadequacy. Education was very difficult to obtain and, therefore, was not encouraged within Aboriginal families (Preston, 2008a). In addition the Aboriginal population was experiencing continuous discrimination and marginalization (University of British Columbia [UBC], n.d.). The original residential school system resulted in children being taken away from their families with the intention of assimilating Aboriginal individuals into mainstream society (UBC, n.d.). As a result, there was a need to address barriers in light of the specific experiences of the student and their community.

The UCEP program at the institution under study was only one of many Aboriginal adult education programs in Canada. Postsecondary programs typically had difficulty with Aboriginal student dropout rates (Preston, 2008). The Aboriginal population was one of the fastest growing populations in Canada. In a study done by Michael Mendelson (2006), it was shown that only 40 years ago there was a small percent of Aboriginal students enrolled in postsecondary education (Preston, 2008b). This has improved; however, there is still a long way to go. With the Aboriginal population

growing and the overall population aging it remains vital to the Canadian economy to ensure a much greater number of Aboriginal students upgrade their education and successfully complete postsecondary college or university education.

Importance of the Problem in My Education Setting

The UCEP program at the university under study had worked to provide an alternative type of upgrading for Aboriginal adults in Alberta, Canada. The entry requirement for students was to pass an English and Math entrance exam (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). Students who entered the program after passing the exam would usually achieve success; however, some were not successful (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). Many Aboriginal students dropped out before the UCEP program was completed (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). There appeared to be a number of factors that determined student success which were not captured by simply having students complete the entrance exams. Bird and McKinnon (2004) believed these students had great potential but left before completion due to barriers that were not clearly defined.

Rationale

The problem this project study was designed to address was the gap in knowledge related to the barriers faced by Aboriginal adult students returning to school. A better understanding of the barriers as they pertain specifically to Aboriginal peoples provides needed information to inform actions aimed at increasing their chance of successful school completion. Aboriginal students experience a number of issues, which impacts

their likelihood of completing educational studies as identified earlier (Preston, 2008a).

As the Aboriginal population grows and the non Aboriginal population ages, there may

be a lack of resources available to ensure Aboriginal students are supported in returning

to school (Preston, 2008b). These young Aboriginal people will need to take their place

in the society of the future. Aboriginal people need an education to better prepare for the

task. The purpose of this project study was to better understand the barriers faced by

Aboriginal adult individuals, so actions can be taken to reduce the effect of the barriers to

educational success and ultimately improve school completion rates.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Preston (2008b) described the profile of the Aboriginal population compared to

the non Aboriginal population and pointed out that Aboriginal workers will form an

increasingly larger percentage of the total labor force in the future decades. Preston

(2008b) and Banks (2007) both described the barriers faced by these people to be

historical, educational, social, financial, geographical, cultural, and pedagogical. Because

of these trends education of this population is more important now than ever before.

Preston (2008b) found 72.4% of male and 66.5% of female Aboriginals obtained less

than a high school education. It was important to identify the specific barriers related to

education and begin the work of removing these barriers (Preston, 2008b).

The problem this project study addressed was the difficulties Aboriginal adult

students faced when attempting to return to school, as described by Bird and McKinnon,

(2004). According to the 2006 Canadian Census, labor force participation rates were

lower for Aboriginals (75%) than for non Aboriginal (86.7%) Canadians (Statistics

Canada, 2011). In 2012, the Canadian Aboriginal Peoples survey found that among the Aboriginal population living off reserve, 72% had received a high school diploma (Statistics Canada, 2013b). The Aboriginal Peoples Survey (Statistics Canada, 2013) also tried to determine some of the factors that would lead to completion of high school. Aboriginals who completed high school were also more likely to achieve high grades, and participate in extra-curricular activities. High school completers were also more likely to have friends who valued education, feel safe and happy at school, feel supported by school staff, and have parents who also completed high school (Statistics Canada, 2013b).

How does the Problem Affect Society?

At the macro level of Canadian society the treatment Aboriginal people have received from the government and the mistrust that history has created among Canadian society were important issues associated with this project study (Preston, 2008a). There seemed to be a standard assumption that Aboriginal people simply are unable to reach higher educational levels (Preston, 2008a). Some funding was available for postsecondary studies but had been deleted when it came to upgrading these individuals to prepare them for success at the higher level of education (Preston, 2008a). Preston (2008b) stated that the costs Aboriginal students face returning to school tend to be higher than non Aboriginal students because they are forced to leave their homes and move to the cities where the universities are located. Also, they can seldom rely on family for any support (Preston, 2008a). There were also issues with higher alcohol and drug use among the adolescent population as well as a higher dropout rate in junior high

school and high school so the need for upgrading was becoming greater (Elton-Marshall, Leatherdale, & Burkhalter, 2011). Elton-Marshall et al. (2011) found that 29.8% of Aboriginal youth reported drinking five or more drinks on a single occasion more than once per month, compared to 19.4% of non Aboriginal youth. In Australia, Nadew (2012) found that 73.8% of Aboriginal people met the diagnostic criteria for an alcohol use disorder. Currie et al. (2011) reported that 19% of Aboriginal university students were considered to be at a high risk for a drinking disorder and a further 6% were likely to develop an alcohol dependence disorder.

Among Aboriginal people, it appeared there had been growing feelings of inadequacy among younger people (Preston, 2008a). Education had been very difficult to obtain and therefore was not encouraged within the family unit (Preston, 2008a). Bird and McKinnon (2004) described the reason these students leave school before graduation was often due to being disheartened by others who had left school early and feelings of being forced to bend to peer pressure. Canadian school curricula and assessment tools did not consider those of Aboriginal background and were therefore biased (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).

At the micro level, which would focus on the individual within their setting, there was a need to interview individuals in this population who were attempting to return to school or had done so successfully and attempt to determine the necessary requirements of the courses to make success a possibility. If this information were available, perhaps governments would look at a different plan for financial, emotional, or other types of assistance.

With all of these barriers, it was important to develop an educational situation for these students that removed barriers to enable learning to begin (Flynn, Brown, Johnson, Rodger, 2011). Many of the adults coming into school from this culture had had many life experiences and had looked at the world through the unique lens of an Aboriginal person (Preston, 2008a). Growing up on a reservation had left them surrounded by Aboriginal ways and beliefs; both positive and negative. This had likely produced meaning schemes or attitudes that were entrenched in who they are as they enter the classroom as an adult.

The purpose of this project study was to explore and determine factors that led some Aboriginal students to drop out from higher education bridging programs. There is a need to understand these factors and better understand how to increase the likelihood of success. Aboriginal culture and life experiences tend to differ from non Aboriginal populations and the project study will help to understand barriers specific to Aboriginals. At the time of the study there was no other entry requirement identified other than the knowledge requirement (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). It was the belief that the students given access to the program were considered to be in a situation to succeed but if there were other components that identify the potential for success it was important that these were identified and considered in the entry process.

This project study will add to the body of knowledge related to Aboriginal adult educational upgrading and will perhaps assist the local university and other institutions in developing entry requirements which better identify the potential for success in this

population of students. The information may also be useful on the global scale in helping

other countries facing similar issues with their Aboriginal populations.

Definitions

The following is a list of terms specific to this project study:

Aboriginal: Aboriginal peoples are all indigenous people of Canada and include

the following groups: Status Indians, Non-Status Indians, Métis, and Inuit. (Joseph, 2005)

Extrinsic barriers: Extrinsic barriers are things considered to be external to the

study participant and therefore generally beyond their control (Ertmer, 1999).

Intrinsic barriers: Intrinsic barriers may include, but not be limited to, obstacles

such as fear, insecurity, and perceptions that keep a student from succeeding in their

studies (Preston, 2008a). Because they are generally considered to be more in the control

of the student, there may provide an opportunity for change. However, this is often not

always the case (Ertmer, 1999).

Reservation (Reserve): Land specifically allocated for use and benefit of an

Aboriginal Band (Joseph, 2005). Band members are not able to own the land, but are able

to reside on this land (Joseph, 2005).

University College Entrance Program (UCEP): The University College Entrance

Program is a bridging program between high school and first-year post-secondary studies

specifically designed to assist adult students wishing to seek higher education (Concordia

University College of Alberta, 2013).

Significance

This project study was meant to determine the barriers or factors, which led Aboriginal students to drop out. There was a need to understand these factors to better address ways to increase future likelihood of success. At the time of the study there was no entry requirement identified other than the knowledge requirement (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013). It is very important the entry requirements take into account the situation of the student and the management of the barriers they may face. The identification of barriers not found presently in the literature may make this possible.

Given the problem was not unique to the local setting; the findings may contribute to a better understanding of the problem in other geographic locations, both nationally and internationally. Ensuring retention and successful completion will help ensure the students are well positioned for advancing their careers or further education. From an institutional perspective, understanding these factors help make the institution more relevant to future students and provides a means of continually improving the educational experience offered.

Research Questions

The purpose of this project study was to identify and examine barriers Canadian Aboriginal adults face as they attempted to return to school. Aboriginal youth were more likely living in situations and communities with more social problems than in non Aboriginal communities (Preston, 2008a). As a result, high school completion rates were

often low (Mendelson, 2006). To be successful in obtaining gainful employment, many Aboriginals attempted to return to school as adults (Preston, 2008b). However, past educational experiences and negative life events made the return to school stressful and potentially increased the risk of failure. To help improve the probability of successfully completing their return to school, it was important to understand the barriers that may be specific to Aboriginal students. Such an understanding will help institutions design supports for Aboriginal students returning to school.

The following are the research questions this project was designed to study:

RQ1. What barriers prevented students from successfully completing a UCEP bridging program?

RQ2. What barriers did adult Aboriginal students overcome in order to successfully complete a UCEP bridging program?

Review of the Literature

Literature Review Process

This review of the literature was conducted by searching multiple databases provided through Walden University library, the University of Alberta library, and the University of Calgary library as well as multiple Internet searches. Terms used to search these databases included: *Canadian Aboriginal students, adults returning to postsecondary education, barriers to returning to school, Aboriginal learning, issues in Aboriginal education, barriers to Aboriginal education* and *Aboriginal people*. The approach used Boolean logic to group search terms until a saturation point was reached in

the number of resultant articles for consideration. Relevant historical literature was included with an emphasis placed on using the most recent literature.

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework can be viewed as a collection of inter-related concepts. Not all aspects need to be defined or well articulated, as the theoretical framework is a tool to guide the researcher's path of inquiry to understand potential relationships (Ertmer, 1999). The project study examined barriers encountered by adult Aboriginal adults returning to school to complete or upgrade their education.

The conceptual framework examined first and second order barriers to successful return to school (Ertmer, 1999). First and second order barriers were considered in two broad categories, extrinsic and intrinsic (Ertmer, 1999). Extrinsic barriers were those that are external to the study participant and generally beyond their control (Ertmer, 1999). These included factors like available resources, access to education, support, or time. While the study participant may have influenced some of these, most of these factors would be difficult or impossible for the subject to change.

Intrinsic barriers appeared on the surface to be more amenable to change, and would include, but not be limited to, obstacles such as fear, insecurity, and perceptions. While the opportunity for change appears to be greater for the individual, this is often not the case (Ertmer, 1999).

Both types of barriers were explored looking to the interaction between them and how they influenced success or failure of the subject's goals. A qualitative approach was

required to explore subject perceptions on the presence and role of extrinsic and intrinsic factors on their success (Creswell, 2009). From here the relationships can be understood.

Historical Background

Until the 1940s, if an Aboriginal person wanted to enroll in postsecondary education they would first need to surrender their status as "Indians" (Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010). In 1968, limited funding was put in place for the very small number of Aboriginals who opted to pursue postsecondary education opportunities (Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010). To further assist with encouraging Aboriginal peoples to attend postsecondary education, the Post-Secondary Educational Assistance program was introduced in 1977 to provide assistance to these Aboriginal adults looking to return to school to further their education.

In 1983, University College Entrance Programs (UCEP) and Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) were introduced to facilitate Aboriginal entry to postsecondary studies (Sharpe & Arsenault, 2010). For students lacking the necessary qualifications, these programs provided an overview of the secondary education curriculum with a focus on key elements needed for postsecondary admission. The studies included some content from introductory postsecondary courses to provide bridging between secondary and postsecondary requirements (Concordia University College of Alberta, 2013).

Demographic Profile and Educational Attainment

The Aboriginal population is the fastest growing population in Canada, increasing in size by 45% between 1996 and 2006 (Statistics Canada, 2008). This is nearly six times faster than the non Aboriginal population, which grew 8% over the same period

(Statistics Canada, 2008). The rate of increase suggests higher fertility rates (Statistics

Canada, 2008). The pregnancy rate among Aboriginal teens is significantly higher than

the non Aboriginal population and has resulted in higher dropout rates among high school

students (Statistics Canada, 2008). This combined with other social problems has

increased the need to examine barriers for returning to school as well as those factors

leading to successful completion (Preston, 2008b). Canada conducted a national

household survey covering roughly 4.5 million households across Canada (Statistics

Canada, 2013a). The survey included questions about education attainment and found

that approximately half (48.4%) of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 years of age had a

postsecondary qualification in 2011 Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013a). This was broken

down into the following types of educational attainment: 14.4% had a trades certificate,

20.6% a college diploma, and only 3.5% had a university certificate or diploma, and

9.8% completed a university degree Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013a). The survey found

that 64.7% of the non Aboriginal population, aged 25to 64 years of age, had some form

of postsecondary qualification. The distribution of qualification types differed between

the Aboriginal and non Aboriginal populations Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

Among the non Aboriginal population, 12% having a trades certificate, 21.3 % with a

college diploma, 4.9% with a university certificate or diploma below the bachelor level

and 26.5% with a university degree Canada (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

There were also notable differences among other age groups. For Aboriginal

adults aged 35 to 44 and those aged 55 to 64, 68% and 58.7% had completed high school,

respectively (Statistics Canada, 2013a). For the non Aboriginal population, the

completion rates were much higher at 88.7% and 79.5% for the 35 to 44 and 55 to 64-year-old age groups, respectively (Statistics Canada, 2013a). Not only do high school and postsecondary completion rates and credential types differ, but also First Nations women were more likely to defer their postsecondary studies until later in life (Milligan & Bouglie, 2009).

In a study done by Mendelson (2006) it was shown that only 40 years ago there were virtually no Aboriginal students in secondary education. While admission to postsecondary studies has increased, there is room for improvement. With the Aboriginal population growing and the overall population aging it is vital to the Canadian economy to ensure a much greater number of Aboriginal students complete upgrading and move on to postsecondary education.

Employment Status

It is well established that educational attainment is a strong predictor of employment and income. Berger and Parkin (2009) stated, "The value of a post-secondary credential has increased at a faster pace than the share of the population completing some form of higher education. In other words, degrees have grown more valuable even as they become less scarce" (p. 1). Aboriginal employment rates in 2006 were 15% below that of non Aboriginal people with 65.8% of the Aboriginal population compared with 81.6% of the non Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2013a). The impact of these can also be seen in the differences in median income with Aboriginals aged 25 to 54 of $22,000 compared with $33,000 for the non Aboriginal population in Canada in 2005 (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

Impact of Residential Schooling

There are a number of barriers which can impact the probability of successful completion of educational goals. Semmar (2006) has indicated that the least understood and addressed barriers are related to the student's psychological well-being. It has been observed that psychological factors play a strong role in influencing how people respond to situational or institutional barriers (Goto & and Martin, 2009). These factors play a significant role within the Aboriginal population.

The residential school programs, which operated in Canada from the 1880s until 1986 impacted many Aboriginal adults directly or indirectly (University of British Columbia, n.d.). Many Aboriginal youths were removed from their families to attend residential schools (Bombay, Matheson, & Anisman, 2011). These schools were created to eliminate all components of Aboriginal culture and many of the students were subjected to physical and emotional abuse (Preston, 2008a). The impact of the schools continues to impact Aboriginal communities (Preston, 2008a). It has been suggested that the negative impacts can be considered multigenerational with many of the descendants suffering the impacts (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006; Hampton & Roy, 2002). Those who went to residential schools lacked parenting skills and were more likely to abuse their own children and family members (Kirkness, 1992).

Barriers to Aboriginal Education

Preston (2008a) provides a review of barriers to Aboriginal education including: historical, educational, social, financial, geographical, cultural, and pedagogical barriers. Norman and Hyland (2003) placed the barriers experienced by adult learners into three

broad categories: situational, institutional, and dispositional. They described situational barriers as those things in one's day-to-day lives, limiting the amount of time a person could spend on studying (Preston, 2008a). An example would be family responsibilities, which decrease the amount of time available. Institutional barriers are those related to the organization of systems that are not responsive to the needs of the adult student (Preston, 2008a). This would include things like scheduling of available courses, admission criteria, and the information made available to the student about the programs. The third type of barrier, dispositional, includes attitudes related to learning, expectations, and motivation that negatively impact student participation in the programs (Preston, 2008a).

Aboriginal students experience all three of the barrier types described by Norman and Hyland (2003). To address these types of issues, Preston (2008a) suggests having Aboriginal elders on staff to assist Aboriginal students. This may well be a key component to addressing issues faced by Aboriginal learners. These issues would not be well understood by anyone other than an Aboriginal who has experienced them as well. Kazis et al. (2007) also suggest adult learners want to limit the amount of classroom time required to complete any educational program. As a result, it is important to examine the role scheduling and type of instruction (e.g. classroom, distance learning) when considering both barriers and solutions to learning.

Summary

The problem is one that is best associated or explained through the transformative learning theory. In transformative learning theory as adults develop and gains knowledge they change the way they perceive the world (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner,

2007).They constantly reevaluate their place in the world with the additional knowledge to eventually change the way the view the world (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Through continuous self-reflection they are able to see new possibilities and become open to this changing view (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The learnings they experience are directly responsible for this transformation (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007).

Aboriginal students often have a background that is weak in the education area due to poor elementary science instruction (Preston, 2008a). They have lived in a culture that considers teaching as something that happens between the elders and the youth (Preston, 2008a). It is in itself a transformational learning environment (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Many of the school programs are not transformational in nature (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Students are taught a subject regardless of how prepared or open the students are to learning (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The Aboriginal population may have a difficult time with this type of learning (Preston, 2008a).

Success in the program could be measured by testing. The type of testing would have to relate to the learning styles of the Aboriginal adult students. The fact stories are used as a means of learning in their culture would suggest a verbal form of testing may be useful and comfortable for the student. Oral examinations may work quite well with these students because it would create a familiar process for the student.

A qualitative investigation exploring the barriers that made students unsuccessful as well as those that were overcome by successful students will make it possible to

formulate a list of such barriers. Analyses of data collected through student interviews, will help identify some of the barriers these student face while attempting to complete the program. Previous studies have indicated that barriers do exist; the purpose of this project study is to try to identify and examine some of these barriers.

Ideally, this project study will provide a list of barriers identified by students and allow educational institutions to look at ways to remove these barriers and enable students to re-enter the educational system and move on toward the completion of a post-secondary education.

Implications

In order to implement change it will be important to use the findings from the research into the specific barriers Aboriginal students face and to ensure that entry requirements take into consideration these potential barriers. There will need to be a variety of stakeholders involved with the implementation of this change. First, the universities will need to review their entry requirements and ensure they do not include barriers that interfere with the success of these students. The government and other funding agencies need to review the educational funding available to these students. There will be a need to work with the Aboriginal communities to help provide and promote higher education both on the reserve through online learning or better educational institutions may need to be built on the reserve. Preston (2008a) describes the need for Aboriginal elders to be on staff to assist students in addressing issues they may face on a day-to-day basis helping them remain in school.

This project study may produce factors that lead to, or inhibit, success in a UCEP program. These results may help inform policies and programs within the academic institution where the project study is planned. This project study may well lead to the development of a white paper, which could guide administrators of such programs. In addition, the findings could be used to establish a tool that would tell potential Aboriginal students and their instructors, the likelihood of successful program completion. The findings may also help guide decisions in other academic institutions. The project developed from this project study may include recommendations to improve a UCEP program.

The way I propose to achieve this would be through the education of the teaching staff, the counselors, the students and the Aboriginal reserves where the students originate. The development of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) will help provide a view of our educational processes to the teachers, counselors and community through the eyes of the Aboriginal adult student. If they are made aware of the barriers perhaps the PLC can work to structure their classes and provide mediation programs in such a way as to remove the barriers.

The steps required to implement the recommendations would first involve the identification of the specific barriers and ways of overcoming them. This would be followed by structuring a PLC and work with other university staff in departments such as recruiting and administration as well as counselors and individuals from the community. The next step would be to implement the PLC and ensure its success. This PLC will require training sessions where barriers identified by this study will be reviewed

and mediation processes will be discussed. The PCL will provide that watchful eye throughout the year and the hope is to identify times when the barriers arise for the student, intervene with the supports necessary to remove the barriers and hopefully enable the student to continue in the program. If the PLC is successful and an increased number of students are successful in their attempts to return to school there is a hope that other institutions in Canada and perhaps other countries to help remove the barriers faced by these Aboriginal adults as they attempt to return to school.

Transition Statement

A number of factors impact the likelihood of success or failure and many appear to be unique to the Aboriginal population. Residential schools had a multi-generational impact that, among other things, resulted in poverty and poor parenting skills that worked to reduce parental support for education (University of British Columbia, n.d.). The loss of cultural connection resulting from residential schools has placed Aboriginal students in a situation where they do not feel fully connected to their own culture while also feeling marginalized by non Aboriginal institutions (University of British Columbia, n.d.).

High school completion rates among Aboriginal youth are low, making adult upgrading a key component to re-entry into the education system (Statistics Canada 2008; Statistics Canada, 2013a). Without an understanding of the barriers that may be faced by Aboriginal students choosing to upgrade their education, the probability of successful completion is reduced. Aboriginal students have a unique situation with higher rates of social problems than the non Aboriginal population that have resulted in lower education attainment and may increase stress levels (Statistics Canada, 2013a).

While statistics on social problems, residential schools and prior educational attainment help to understand the problem, they lack direct information from the Aboriginal population itself. Only through a qualitative design can the perspectives of Aboriginal students be fully uncovered and understood. Section 2 will describe, in detail, the approach to identifying the barriers, both perceived and real, of students who have re-entered the educational system with the goal of upgrading their education.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This project study used a qualitative case study approach. Qualitative research designs were intended to create an understanding from the data throughout the project study process and to develop explanations of social phenomena (Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2014). It was accomplished through data collection focused on opinions, perceptions, feelings, and experiences of the study subjects, making a qualitative approach more appropriate than a quantitative approach. A qualitative approach allowed for a more fulsome exploration and understanding of the barriers than would have been afforded by a quantitative approach. Perceptions, feelings, and experiences are all complex phenomenon and a qualitative approach helped generate a better understanding of the barriers. This differed from quantitative approaches where the researcher has a hypothesis in mind to guide the data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2009).

A qualitative investigation, using a multiple case study design, exploring the barriers that made students unsuccessful, as well as those barriers that were overcome by successful Aboriginal students, made it possible to formulate a list of those barriers. An analysis of data collected through student interviews was used. Previous studies had indicated that barriers did exist; the purpose of this project study was to identify and examine those barriers as they may apply specifically to Aboriginal adults.

This project study provided a list of barriers identified by students and will allow educational institutions to look at ways to monitor and remove those barriers and enable students to reenter the educational system and move on toward the completion of a

postsecondary education. The qualitative approach allowed examination of the issue in its context. A quantitative approach was originally considered, however, it was decided this would not provide enough detail of the issues faced by these students. Many do not feel comfortable writing down the information in a survey due to the lack of trust in how this data would be used (Preston, 2008a). It also did not allow the researcher to work on the details around the barriers these students faced when attempting to return to school.

This section provides an overview of the project study design that includes procedures of data collection and data analysis. It also addresses issues related to data access, participant consent, and protection of participant identity.

Project Study Design and Approach

A qualitative case study research design was used. There were advantages to this approach as the project study is concerned with student factors or attributes of a specific cultural subpopulation. Understanding barriers from the Aboriginal student perspective provided information, which could not be gleaned from a quantitative approach. The project study purpose was to explore the perceptions, feelings, and experiences of Aboriginal students as part of the identification of barriers to returning to school. Aboriginal students view barriers differently than non Aboriginal students making a qualitative approach appropriate. The qualitative approach is familiar to most researchers and is a well-validated method (Creswell, 2009).

Participants

A notice of the study was placed at four Aboriginal Band offices, all located within 175 kilometers from the city of Edmonton. The notice included information on the

study purpose and invited interested individuals to contact the researcher to express their interest in participation. The researcher explained the purpose of the study and asked each potential participant to confirm that they had enrolled in a UCEP program between 2008 and 2013. The researcher also asked the student to confirm if they had completed the full program.

Aboriginal students were randomly selected from all those potential participants responding that they are interested in participating in the study. This approach can be considered random purposeful sampling as the intent is to have a small, but information rich, sample (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010) from a specific cultural group. The number of participants was limited to ten (five successful and five unsuccessful) to allow for a more in-depth exploration of the extrinsic and intrinsic barriers.

It was made clear that participation is voluntary and that withdrawal from the project study can happen at any time. Also, invitees were told that all information would be held confidential and no identifiable information would be shared. The project study consent form was attached to the email along with additional details on the project study (See Appendix B). The consent form included background information on the project study and the procedures to be used. It also included that the project study is voluntary and highlighted any potential risks.

Once individuals agreed to be contacted to schedule an interview, a mutually agreeable time was set. To ensure an appropriate researcher-participant relationship, the investigator and participant engaged in a dialogue to understand the process and purpose of the project study. The dialogue helped to establish a rapport with the participant to put

them at ease. This also ensured that the project study stayed focused on the acquisition of qualitative data and did not deviate into areas that perceived as providing therapeutic benefit (Eide & Kahn, 2008).

<div style="text-align:center">Participants</div>

Criteria for Participant Selection

The students consisted of Aboriginal adults over the age of 21 years, a UCEP program requirement, and consisted of a mixture of men and women. They were from a variety of different populations of Aboriginals from different Aboriginal Bands located within 175 kilometers of the city of Edmonton. A sample size of 10 was used for the project study. This allowed for a more in-depth understanding of extrinsic and intrinsic barriers.

Sample Size and Method

A purposeful sample was used in this project study and involved the selection of 10 students who attended the program. To contrast successful and unsuccessful students, five interviewees were selected for each group (Creswell, 2009). Study participants were asked if they completed the program to allow the sample to be split into the two groups of interest. A convenience sample, using a purposeful sampling approach, was used. A convenience sample, sometimes referred to as accidental sampling, is a nonprobability sampling approach (Creswell, 2009). The population is selected because it is readily available and easily accessible (Polit & Hungler, 1987). The sample size was limited to allow for a more thorough and in-depth interview process. Additional interviews would be conducted if needed.

Procedures for Gaining Access

As part of the initial stages of the project study, Aboriginal Band offices were asked to post a notice of the study within their office. The notice included contact details for the researcher. Once individuals expressed an interest in participating, the researcher sent an email with a brief explanation of the project study project, a copy of the consent form, and asked willingness to participate. For students not providing an email, the researcher followed up by telephone and provided information on the study verbally. Students were asked to sign the consent form either in advance or prior to the interview starting.

This project study design involved interviewing students previously enrolled in a UCEP program. Through an interview process, students who have been successful as well as those who were not successful were interviewed about the specific experience they had. Interviewees were asked what made them continue through the program or elect to drop out of the program. The interview protocol included open-ended questions, which targeted barriers that forced students to drop out before completing their program. In addition, questions were asked to determine the barriers which successful candidates overcame which allowed them to complete their chosen program. The interview protocols are included in Appendices C and E.

Open-ended interviews were conducted with up to 10 participants throughout the time period allocated for data collection. The participants were picked from a list of students who attended a UCEP program in the past 5 years. One interview per participant was conducted at the private office of the researcher. Each participant was only

interviewed once, however, additional contact may have been required to clarify any responses. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes and was audiotaped, recorded, and transcribed. If specific students were not comfortable with the audiotape, it was turned off and only written notes were used. Information from the interviews was then be categorized and coded for analysis.

All interview materials and notes, including audio recordings, were stored in a locked filing cabinet located in the researcher's home. These data are available upon request of Walden University's research committee, as well as the Walden University IRB. Furthermore, each interviewee was provided with a transcribed copy of their interview if they asked to have a copy. A member check was planned. Each participant was offered the opportunity to review their interview, suggest changes and edit their original responses. Also, the interviewer was using observation and existing literature to validate the findings.

Researcher-Participant Relationship

To ensure an open line of communication between the researcher and the participants, the researcher's contact details were provided. These included both an email and phone number. The researcher encouraged participants to communicate any questions or concerns throughout data collection period. The interviewees were selected from a list of those that contacted the researcher and expressed an interest in participation. The participants had to have attended a UCEP program in the last 5 years. Any participants known to have been a student of the researcher were excluded from the study.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) process through Walden University was granted prior to conducting this project study, ensuring ethical procedures were being met and participants were being protected from harm. The IRB Approval Number was 03-11-15-0148039. Furthermore, support of the academic institution from which students were selected was gained during the initial steps of this investigation. Cooperation from the school's administration was critical to the success of the project study and the administration must be fully supportive.

Throughout the project study process participants' identity remained confidential. No identifiable information of any of the participants was used in this project study or reported in any reports of findings. A signed consent form from each participant was collected, and all issues involving clarity of confidentiality were detailed. Participants were informed about the interview process, the length of time for the interview, and how the results of the interview were to be used prior to the collection of any data. Furthermore, no participating individuals were identifiable throughout all reports of data collection and findings reported as the result of this project study. All computers used were password protection for logging on and for accessing any of the files. Computers were locked in a secure location. Participants were free to exit the project study at any time without a need for explaining their decision.

Data Collection

There were two sources of data collection (a) one interview with each of the 10 participants; which included observations and field notes made during interviews; (b) one interview with a counselor for the program to discuss the barriers students faced to help gain a better understanding of the extent of these barriers. This approach helped to uncover insights relevant to the research problem and inform not only the themes, but also the interview questions. There was no identification or discussion of specific students in the interview to ensure privacy but the interview offered a deeper understanding as to how the barriers complicated the student's lives and caused them to drop out.

There was one interview with each participant. Only one-on-one personal interviews were conducted using a series of open-ended questions. Probing questions were used to gain more detail where necessary and each interview was recorded on audiotape. This type of data was in line with a qualitative research design as it allowed the researcher to ask questions that helped lead the discussion (Creswell, 2009). It also allowed the researcher to ask probing questions to get a more in-depth understanding of the initial answers given (Creswell, 2009). This type of data was important to help identify the barriers experienced by Aboriginal students and was done in a manner that is respectful of their culture. The hope was to identify new themes or issues that may not yet be well known or defined.

The interviews lasted between 30 minutes and 45 minutes in length and were held in a meeting room at the researcher's current place of employment. They consisted of an icebreaker question, followed by a preliminary description of what the process was and then five questions, primarily demographic, related to some specifics about the participant. There were then five guiding questions asked by the researcher and answered by the participant; probing questions were used within each of these as required. The sessions were all audiotaped with the full knowledge of the participant and the researcher kept field notes which included observations made during the session as well as a precaution to the audiotape not capturing everything that was said or malfunctioning entirely (Creswell, 2009). The audiotapes worked very well throughout all the interviews and the field notes were used to identify specific facial reactions or body language of the participant. The body language data was important in understanding the emotional importance of any given comment.

Time was given after each question to allow the researcher to finish making notes. The interview ended with students allowed to add any other comments and then a thank-you statement was given and some time to just talk outside the interview was allowed. Each participant took part in one interview and was allowed to stop an answer or the entire interview at any point for any reason. This did not happen in any of the interviews; for the most part the students were eager to tell their story and answered the questions with great detail. Participation was completely voluntary and there were cases where students did not want to be interviewed for a variety of reasons. The data were organized by each participant, assigned an anonymous code, and kept at one site under lock and

key. The audiotapes were transcribed after each interview to not mix up one participant with another. The researcher kept a research log, field notes, and reflective journal to keep track of the data. This allowed time for reflections to be made after the data has been collected and transposed. The research log was kept on a password-protected computer to ensure confidentiality.

Member checking, a process for improving accuracy, credibility, and validity, was used (Harper & Cole, 2012). During a follow-up meeting participants were asked to review the transcribed notes to ensure the notes accurately reflected the views of the participant. Peer debriefing was also employed as a means of ensuring the collection of valid information. The peer debriefing used involved inviting two colleagues with no prior knowledge of the study to review transcripts, notes, and interpretations. This process helped to reduce the risk of over or under emphasizing particular points, vague descriptions or bias that may have been introduced by the researcher (Given, 2008).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher was an experienced science teacher at an institution offering a UCEP program. While some of the participants were no longer active students in the program, the amount of time allocated to the interviews and contact was consistent. Students previously taught by the researcher were not considered eligible for the study. As a means of reducing bias, there was limited contact made between the researcher and participant throughout the data collection period with the exception of the interviews. Contact only occurred when interviewees initiated the contact. The most appropriate data

collection method was the interview. It allows the researcher to probe and obtain deeper

enlightenment of the situation (Creswell, 2007). The interview questions aligned with the

research questions.

Table 1

Alignment of Research and Interview Questions

Research Questions	What barriers prevented students from successfully completing a UCEP bridging program?	What barriers did adult Aboriginal students overcome in order to successfully complete a UCEP bridging program?
Corresponding Interview Questions	• What accomplishments are you most proud of in your life? What made you proud? Why were you proud? • What are your life goals? • What are possible obstacles to accomplishing your life goals? • How supportive is your family of your education? • Tell me about your personal experience with the school. • What barriers popped up as you were going through the process of re-entering the education system (School)?	• For those who completed the program; • What motivated your decision to come back to school? • What does completing the program mean to you? • Why was this important to you? • For those who dropped out before completing; • What were the factors that influenced your decision to drop out? • Was there anything the school could have offered you or done for you that would have allowed you to continue?

Data Analysis

The major goal of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth understanding of a given topic under investigation (Hatch, 2002; Lodico et al., 2010). Interviews were transcribed and data was coded into major themes. The coding process initially allowed for broad, overarching themes to be identified (Creswell, 2009). Data was then color-coded grouping specific data points into themes with one or two-word identifiers attached to each color. From the broad themes, a framework was developed to provide a deeper and more robust understanding of the barriers experienced by the participants, until the barriers were fully understood. There was an expectation that there may be some discrepant barriers that may not fit with any of the themes. These barriers were included in the findings as they may be indications of barriers that are not expected in the general population but would be important to be aware of as potential barriers in some individuals.

Substantive and theoretical coding was used to achieve a theoretical saturation point (Holton, 2010). Substantive coding included conceptualizing the empirical matter being studied. The process started with open coding, with line-by-line coding of the data in all possible ways. This acted to stimulate thought and ideas on the conceptual ideas underlying the data. The open coding was followed by using a theoretical sampling and constant comparison approach to assess whether the data continued to support the categories identified (Holton, 2010). Next, the comparisons were used to create a concept code and any new emerging concepts. This approach was repeated until no new concepts were developed.

At the saturation point hypotheses were generated to account for how barriers were or were not overcome. Recording reflective notes, also referred to as memoing, was begun at the substantive coding stage creating themes and refining them throughout the process of analysis (Given, 2008). Data organization and analysis was done manually.

Validation Procedures

A factor that might threaten the internal validity of the project is that all participants are being selected from one institution and one program within the institution. This could make it difficult to differentiate personal from institutional barriers. There are other programs of this same sort at other institutions and they are operated and managed by the same rules. The project study was related to the barriers that students face when attempting to return to school and should be similar throughout all the institutions that offer this program. A narrative was included in the final report describing the barriers experienced by Aboriginal students and how these barriers affect the student during the attempt to return to school.

Data Analysis Results

The results provide insight into the two main underlying questions described in Table 1. The open-ended questionnaire, used in the interview process, was designed to answer these questions by drawing on the experience of the study participants. It focused on examining the life circumstances of the participants and how these circumstances became barriers to successful learning as well as the strategies used by successful students to overcome the barriers. Aside from question 13 that was only asked of

participants that successfully completed a UCEP program, all other questions were asked

of all study participants. The answers provided had relevance to each of the two research

questions.

The data presented are taken from the interviews of 11 former students and that of

one counselor working with a UCEP program. Of the 11 former students, 6 had

completed the program and 5 had not. At the time of the program, 9 of the students

reported they were single. Three of the 9 were single parents. Two of the 11 were living

common law. Nine of the 11 were unemployed. While not directly included in questions

and 9 of the students indicated that they had made multiple attempts to complete a UCEP

program. The 2 that did not have previous attempts did not complete the program.

Research Question 1 Findings

What barriers prevented students from successfully completing a UCEP bridging

program?

Interview Question 1 Responses

The first interview question inquired as to what accomplishments the participant

was most proud of in their lives and what about the accomplishment made them proud.

There was an overall need to feel an inner pride for accomplishing something that seemed

unreachable. It appeared that the students that had successfully completed the program

commented that they gained lots of pride from the accomplishment and even those that

did not complete the program showed pride in getting as far as they had. Of the 6 that

completed the program 5 indicated they were very proud of their accomplishment. One

student commented, "I was a single mom and I was able to finish the UCEP program and

do as well as I did, this has shown me what I am capable of and I have remembered that in everything I did afterwards." The field notes captured that the subject became teary eyed during this statement, indicating a strong emotional response. Other responses were related to pride in family and business relationships. Other comments related to this theme elicited strong emotional body language, indicated in the field notes.

Interview Question 2 Responses

The second interview question asked participants what their life goals were, 8 of the 11 individuals answered that finishing their education was their life goal. Of the 6 students that completed the program all but one was planning on moving further with their education or had already started a post-secondary program. The other student's goal was to assist the people on the reserve. Two commented that they wanted to beat their addiction before returning to school. One student stated, "I hope to try school again, I will need to be self-sufficient if I ever hope to get my children back." These 3 all stated that they would like to get further education but did not suggest it as the first step they needed to take. From the field notes, the body language data suggested a high degree of uncertainty about the future among the three that stated a desire to return to school.

Interview Question 3 Responses

The third question asked students about the obstacles could prevent them from achieving their life goals. Six of the students identified funding as the main issue, of these 4 had completed the program and 2 had not. One student shared the issues related to funding and that any individual born after 1985 is not considered a hereditary treaty Indian. This student was born in 1983 so was able to get funding for post-secondary

however could not make it past the upgrading where the spouse was born after 1985 but was not eligible for funding even after making it through the UCEP program and having the ability to go on to post-secondary. The reserve will assist a student born before 1985 but not those born after that time.

The other 3 students that had not completed had issues related to substance abuse or mental illness. The other 2 that completed one complained that there they had a poor family situation with a poor male role model that student stated "When I was growing up I did not have a very good family situation, my father was very abusive and moved away when I still young. There were no schools for older kids on the reserve so I was out of school fairly young trying to do correspondence however it was not easy and I did not get far." Based on these comments and the body language data captured in the field notes, there was a high level of embarrassment. There were similar complaints in one of the students that did not complete the program. The student stated "The reserve is really a trap, it traps you, like being in jail, where else are you supposed to go, there is nowhere to go, and nothing to do but get in trouble or look at getting in trouble. There are no expectations, no dreams." The body language data indicated a level of anger associated with life on the reserve. The other student that had completed commented on that fact that when they attempted to finish school before the UCEP program they seemed to have a fear of completion, the student stated, "I do not know if it is just fear of what it is…I psyche myself out, feel I just cannot do the final year."

Interview Question 4 Responses

Interview question four asked how supportive the students' family was to them returning to school. Of the 6 students that had finished the program successfully 4 of them indicated they had support from the family and 2 did not have the support. Of the 5 that did not complete the program all 5 indicated a lack of family support to return to school. It was this question that first identified residential schools as part of these student's life stories. One student commented, "most of my family was somehow involved in the residential school days and does not think much of education. My grandfather went to residential school and hates any talk of school at all." Another student commented My mom was the only one around and she hated everything related to school, she just tried to keep me home and safe all the time as a child…my grandmother did not like school either and there was a lot of discussion about how bad it was around the home and reserve." Based on the body language data, there was a mixture of emotional responses to this ranging from anger to a lack of understanding of what relatives had experienced. Another commented that residential school backgrounds make us untrusting of any white school, even the UCEP program the expectations are you are going to get screwed in some way."

Interview Question 5 Responses

Interview question five asked about the student's personal experience with the school; for those students that did not succeed most of the themes here were around lack of support from anyone regarding attending school, issues from family around residential schools, problems relating to peer pressure which often led to substance abuse and lots of

issues around racism is they did attend school. Another common theme was around sabotage which a student will do to themselves when pressures get too much. The counselor explained this saying "perhaps students not having a model of success would come to fear success because expectations would increase for them and I saw this many times with students that were so close to finishing then they would not finish, not come for final exams, if there were drug and alcohol issues or addictions this is when they would reoccur. When the pressures were great on them they would quit."

Interview Question 6 responses

Question six asked the student to describe the barriers that came up as they were going the process of returning to school. The barriers here were quite clear for those students that did not complete the program; the themes were around support or lack of support, funding, lack of confidence, substance abuse, and poor early education. Most of the body language data suggested that the students were frustrated and angered that these issues contributed to failing to complete the program. For those that did complete they listed themes such a self-confidence, health and medication issues and sabotage both from friends and from family. These people would ask them why they were working so hard and getting so stressed and that they should quit and come back to the reserve.

Research Question 2 Findings

What barriers did adult Aboriginal students overcome in order to successfully complete a UCEP bridging program?

Interview Question 6 Responses

Question six again asked what barriers popped up when the students were going through the program; the ones that were successful overcame the barriers. The list of the barriers is indicated by the common themes that were derived from the study

Interview Question 7 Responses

Question 7 was a specific question for the students that did not complete the program. I asked them what factors influenced their decision to drop out and if the school could have helped in any way to keep them in the program. All of the students that dropped out of the program began the response to this question by saying that the stresses increased as school went on and they had a difficult time with the stress. They quickly returned to old habits some went back to drinking one to methamphetamine as they described it. One returned home for Christmas holidays and old friends helped them relieve the stress by giving them the meth and they could not get off it when they returned after the holidays. One student had sick children and the friends that agreed to support them with child care were unreliable and the student began not to attend to take care of the children and eventually became sick themselves and fell too far behind so did not return to the program and eventually dropped out. One student described getting madder and madder as the stress increased and began to talk about residential schools in the interview. They said that with the attitudes related to schooling the student did not have anyone to talk to because his own people were also as angry as he had become. Their anger was not stress related but related to the residential schools history.

When asked if there was anything the school could have done to assist the student, most students were not sure but some of the ideas included some sort of an idea of what they were up against, one student said "I really had no idea; if I had done better when I was younger I may have had a chance. But really did not have a good background and although the teachers in the program gave me some study techniques, I did not really listen and try them out." Another commented about needing some spiritual presence by saying; "maybe getting back to prayer, seems to work in other situations, getting back to my support people, finding the way to continue when things got hard. I simply could not cope. I quit drinking again and would like to return to try again. I think I could make it this time." They commented that there was "not an Aboriginal safe place for me on campus…it was not until I returned to my Kokum (grandmother) in the summer that I felt I could be comfortable and depress from the stress." Of the five students that dropped out before completing the program four of them indicated this was the first attempt at returning to school. The identification of a lack of traditional spirituality appeared to manifest in body language suggesting a sense of emptiness.

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes

It was apparent that those that wanted to return to school or returning to school was a life goal, were overall more likely to be successful. There was an overall need for self-pride which came with the accomplishment of gaining an education. The one thing that seemed to be a major theme was that the return to school took more than one attempt in all of the cases. It seemed with each attempt they faced new barriers. The repeated attempts led to creative ways of addressing the barriers and this increased their

motivation to ultimately succeed. Confidence among the students increased with each attempt at success. There was a strong influence of peers, both negatively and positively. Many viewed their instructor as a key motivator and supporter. This helped to overcome some of the barriers identified. Most participants commented on the pressure to use and misuse alcohol and illicit drugs. Financial barriers were common among each of the participants. The themes were identified in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes and Associated Codes

Theme	Codes that fit the Theme
Building self-confidence and personal pride	Need to have the pride in themselves to improve their confidence. Need to build their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment. Need to Establish a cycle of success. Need to establish that they can be successful and that school completion was possible
Social Environment	External – related to society as a whole. friends, family, coworkers, bad influences, crime, bad early education, bad upbringing, peer pressure, Internal – specific to the person, includes self-sabotage, suicide, substance use and abuse,
Racism	Residential Schools, cause of anger issues. No father figure, Family issues, no trust in Government Somehow can relate the negative impact of residential schools to many of the problems listed. It had a negative impact on family structures and cultural identity, fathers left, trust was lost, people are angry Specific racism, being called names, unwanted in schools

Spirituality	Need for spirituality, Need for familiar surroundings, a safe place Importance of rituals Connection to faith Connection to ancestors A place to pray, Need for ceremonies such as round dances and pow wows
Government/governance issues Funding issues, Bill C31 a bill identifying what year an Aboriginal person must be born in order to receive various funding for education	Federal government intrusion, lack of trust, imposed restrictions (level of government that deals with Aboriginal people) Provincial government – lack of programs, supports and view it is a federal issue (Provincial Governments historically do not fund or govern Aboriginal people Band government – corruption, misuse of funds, lack of self-management (link back to federal role and restrictions, federal government supplies them with money but does not monitor how it is spent)
Mental Health and Addictions (Substance abuse, Mental Health)	Ease of falling into old habits. Higher when returning to the reserve environment or with friends. Worse if there was family abuse which there was a lot of on the reserves. Substance use begins earlier (e.g., around age 14). Prone to drinking and poor quality street drugs, sometimes gasoline or Lysol spray, Glues
Value of Education (Comment: Outlier said by one student) (Student completed program)	Students said they required a personal realization of the value of educational attainment for attaining life goals. This finally helped them to be successful.
Activist for the People (Comment: Outlier said by one student) (Student did not complete the program)	Feeling there is a need to advance the needs of not just themselves, but their community. A sense of activism in efforts to improve the system and opportunities for other members of their community. The desire to act as a role model.

Evidence of Quality

The interview content validity measurement compared the data and the identifying the similar responses. Member checking was used to improve accuracy, credibility, and validity of the data (Harper & Cole, 2012). The participants were all students of the program and were similar although not exact in age. The discrepancies in answers were specific to the experiences of the individual student and a truthful account of what they felt or experienced. The students looked over the transcribed data where possible and agreed with the transcription meaning they agreed that what was there is what they had stated in the interview. The responses did provide the data that the study sought.

Conclusion

It is so important that the specific barriers Aboriginal adults face when returning to school are identified and methods are put into place to help eliminate those barriers. The Aboriginal population is a very fast growing population and our country will soon depend on individuals from this population to be leaders in government and other important positions. The need to solve this problem is more important now than ever before. Many stakeholders will need to be involved in order to ensure the significance of the barriers is diminished, and eventually removed. There definitely needs to be an increase in Aboriginals completing an education. The problem is not specific to Canada; it exists in other countries as well. It will be important to share these findings globally in

hope they will be helpful in identifying and removing barriers for all Aboriginal people as

well.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The genre of this project will be a Professional Learning Community (PLC) made up of teachers, counselors, students and a variety of Aboriginal communities. The purpose of this study was to identify barriers that adult Aboriginal students face as they attempt to return to school in hopes of achieving postsecondary education. The study identified a list of barriers that a student needs overcome in order to stay in the program. These barriers fit under a number of common themes identified in the study including; building self-confidence and personal pride, social environment, racism, spirituality, government issues, and value of education. The goal of the professional learning community will be to become educated in what these barriers are, monitor their occurrences, and provide support to the student to help them overcome the barrier and continue in the program rather than choosing to drop out. The specific plan is to educate and empower the people in the lives of the students to help watch for the warning signs that a barrier has appeared and provide the support the student needs before it becomes too large a barrier and they make the choice to leave the program.

Rationale

Richardson (2011) indicated that the PLCs are the most recent educational initiative that actually creates change in practices. Hord (2009) indicated that a professional is one that is responsible for a student's education, which would then qualify individuals other than just the teachers as being a part of the overall process. Hughes-Hassell, Brasfield and Dupree (2012) indicated that PLCs awaken an individuals'

responsibility towards a common goal. Linder et al (2012) indicated that within a PLC it is the entire group that becomes a resource with an extensive knowledge and experience base behind them. The PLC was meant to combine both a professional and a community influence. Louis (2008) stated that, professionalism is, "based on specialized knowledge and a focus on serving client needs"; whereas community is, "based on caring, support, and mutual responsibility within a group" (p. 6). The combination of professionals such as teachers and the counselors and the community, including the different bands and reserves where the students were from, and the students themselves will create a well-rounded PLC. It was important for educators, counselors, Aboriginal adult students, and Aboriginal community members to understand the barriers that Aboriginal adult students face and the warning signs that a barrier has been reached. Next it was important that there was intervention and a solution was provided to take the stress off the student and ensure they remained in the program. Providing assistance to students to overcome barriers would increase their chances of success in this program, and any attempts at postsecondary education.

Review of the Literature

Literature Review Process

Searching multiple databases provided through Walden University library, University of Alberta library, and the University of Calgary library, as well as multiple Internet searches conducted this review of the literature. Terms used to search these databases included: *professional learning community (ies); PLC; professional learning communities and teachers; professional learning communities and students; professional*

learning communities and adult education; and professional learning communities and

Aboriginal students. The literature review provides a history of PLCs, PLC components,

common vision, and values, and describes the concepts of shared leadership, peer

collaboration, community learning creativity, and ends with considerations for measuring

desired outcomes.

History of Professional Learning Communities

PLCs are not an entirely new idea, as early as 1916 educators and theorists such as

Dewey considered schools to be educational and social institutions (Dewey, 1916). In

1924, Follet created a version of a PLC in the workforce although it was not very

sophisticated. Griffin (1941) focused teachers on working together as a group to assist

students and help them be successful. In 1978, Vygotsky developed a theory that

involved the importance of groups or communities being important in helping students be

successful (Vygotsky, 1978). Rosenholtz (1989) also supported the idea of teachers

working together in groups as a more successful approach. Hord (1997) made use of the

term *learning community* to describe these working groups and identified the goal of

them being to help students be successful. There are many examples of schools that have

created partnerships between parents, the school district, members of the community,

businesses, social and psychological services and even government departments. (Stoll,

Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). Stoll et al. (2006) stated that the

development of a school can be enhanced by internal and external personal and both can

work to increase student success. Community can be a very important part of a PLC

(DuFour, & Eaker, 1998). The definition of a community is a comprehensive whole,

made up of individuals who are independent of one another yet share the same interests (Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993). Westheimer (1999) listed five components of community being "shared beliefs and understandings; interaction and participation; interdependence; concern for individual and minority views; and meaningful relationships" (p.74). Richardson (2011) indicated that within a PLC there is a need to share problems and any solutions and change the culture in the school for a more unified approach with student success at the center of importance.

The unified approach relies on collaboration and in order to have successful collaboration it is vital that there is a trust that the group has a common mission (Hord, 2009). Hord (2009) described the necessity of a supportive atmosphere must exist if students are to benefit from the PLC. Fullan (2006) concluded from his studies that effective schools used collaboration and that schools should be developed as PLCs.

Components of a PLC

The literature describes the components of a PLC to include a shared leadership, common vision, common values, collaboration amongst peers, community learning, creativity, and a way of measuring the outcomes (Hord, 2009, Owens, 2010). Bryk, Camburn and Louis (1999) stated that even with a PLC culture present there still needs to be a focus on student achievement. The goals need to be clear and all that are involved need to have a good working relationship based on trust and a common goal that is student centered.

Common Vision and Values

Owens (2010) indicates that in order to enhance student achievement members of a PLC must work together to identify a common vision and equal values. The PLC group members will be from diverse backgrounds which will need to play a part in setting up goals by using the strengths of the members of the group to identify the best course of action and determine obtainable goals (Hord, 2009). Clausen, Aquino and Wideman (2009) added that with the many different backgrounds of the group members the PLC would only be successful in a task if all members of the group agree on the priority of the task.

Shared Leadership

It is vital that all members of a PLC have equal importance; there needs to be a shared leadership. Owens (2010) was clear that all members must feel empowered to take part in making the student successful. There must be a shared buy in for problem solving and offering solutions when issues arise. The group as a whole develops the goals this way there is an agreement on the direction and operation of the PLC. Rinke (2009) suggested that as with any groups conflicts will occur and again it important that there is an engagement of the group in dealing with the conflicts; this is an important aspect of a successful PLC.

Collaboration with Peers in PLC

If a PLC is going to be successful it is important that there is collaboration amongst the group. Meetings are needed to update the PLC and discuss issues that occur. Hipp and Huffman (2010) indicated that for this to work there must be respect for one

another inside the PLC group and in order for this to happen there must be trust in one another's' reasons for being in the group. Hord (2009) identified the need for the belief in the common goal derived by the members of the PLC. Owen (2010) wrote on the importance of a positive attitude of those in the group. Rinke (2009) was clear that if the peer collaboration is in place and working well, there would be solutions found that are new and innovative. These new and innovative solutions should make it possible for the student to succeed.

Community Learning and Creativity

Richardson (2011) indicated that both PLC members and students learn in PLCs. The shared learning helps sustain the PLC's mission and build on their knowledge (Owens, 2010). Owens (2010) asserted that this knowledge seeking leads to new ideas and alternative solutions which will further the goals. This type of action stretches the group members' current knowledge (Avila, 2009). Clausen, Aquino, and Wideman (2009) stated that as the members build on their knowledge the potential for new innovative ideas increases within the group and new solutions are brought to the table. Rinke (2009) indicated that this new thinking could empower the group to see themselves as *change agents*. The new learnings and formation of alternative solutions experienced by the PLC will make the collaborative process more effective to promote student success.

Measuring Desired Outcomes

Hipp and Huffman (2010) stated there needs to be tangible measurements to indicate whether the desired outcomes of the PLC were achieved. They stated that the

clearest way to measure outcomes is looking at individual student successes. Owens

(2010) indicated the strength of individual PLCs comes with the ability to tailor fit the

PLC to the specific needs of the students it serves. Richardson (2011) stated that by

examining the individual student outcomes members can find individualized solutions

and provide specific interventions where needed.

Literature Review Summary

Professional Learning Communities have been established in schools since the

early 1900s and have been considered an effective way to make change (DuFour &

Eaker, 1998). The makeup of a PLC may involve many components, such as teachers,

support staff, parents, students, and community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Members of a

PLC need to have a common vision and values, and need to be reminded of these

throughout the year (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). There needs to be open collaboration and a

true obligation to the PLC direction from all members in order to ensure the required

assistance is provided to the student in a timely fashion (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). It is

important to work together as a team early on to ensure everyone is clear on his or her

roles and responsibilities. As the PLC becomes more effective, learning will certainly

take place that will further strengthen the work that is already being done (DuFour &

Eaker, 1998).

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Project Description

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The project was the creation of a professional learning community (PLC)

involving student's teachers, counselors, and members of the Aboriginal community. The

problem identified was that adult Aboriginal students would run into barriers as they

made an attempt to return to postsecondary education and they would have a tendency to

drop out. If the barriers could be identified and overcome during the process there should

be a higher likelihood that the students will remain in the program and be successful in

their attempt. There were a number of barriers that were identified by the study and it will

be important to be sure everyone involved is educated as to what the barriers are, are able

to see the warning signs to help identify them, and understand what the plan is to

intervene in a timely manner to avoid having the student drop out of the program. The

members of the PLC were determined as key players in the identification of the barriers

as well as the providers of the programs or assistance that will help remove the barriers.

The goal of the project is to reduce dropouts by identifying the barriers as they occur and

intervening in a timely manner with solutions to remove the barrier.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

In order to get all the components of the PCL in place it will be important to begin

the process in the summer before the program begins. Permissions from the school will

need to be obtained in order to continue with the planning. I will work with the school

and circulate posters and flyers at the beginning of the summer to the different reserves

associated with the original study and also notify the teaching staff and counselors of the

formation of the PLC. I will work with the counselors to identify dates and locations for

the PLC training workshop that will take place as the students are registering for classes

for the fall.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

There will be one member of the PLC identified as the facilitator. This selection will take place through a vote by the group at the end of the training workshop. The facilitator will finalize the schedule of meetings throughout the year and ensure spaces are available to meet and all in the PLC know about the dates and times. Thornton and Cherrington (2014) identified the facilitator as the individual who serves as the liaison between the staff and the other members of the PLC. This individual, will as chairperson at the meetings, guide the discussion as well ensuring the discussion is open, respectful and on task. The students' responsibility as part of the PLC will be identified to them in the onboarding week as they register and begin classes. They will also have a training workshop to educate them on the workings and importance of the group.

Project Evaluation

The goal of the PLC is to increase Aboriginal student success rate by identifying and removing the barriers that the students face as they are working through the program. This will remove the stress they face and prevent them from dropping out of the program. Remaining in the program gives the students the chance to be successful in the academic portion of the program. DuFour & Eaker (1998) were clear that a PLC must have results in mind in order to be effective. Seo & Han (2012) stated that members of a PLC must be able to see the results of their work need to evaluate their effectiveness.

Implementation

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

To ensure a successful PLC there needs to be an overall leader who is really the organizer to keep the group focused, watch for problems, and ensure the goals are being met (Seo & Han, 2012). The group will need to meet at the different times of the year as scheduled in the plan and also to meet if any barriers are identified by any member of the group related to negative changes in student progress. It will be important to have times when all the members of the group can meet and also important that members of the group are serious enough about the PLC to ensure they keep meeting dates open on their schedules. There will need to be a comfortable meeting place for all to gather when there are concerns and also areas to intervene with mitigation strategies that will assist in overcoming the barriers. These may be spiritual in manner and may involve cultural activities that will help the student. The activities may require special spaces if smudging is required. Smudging is a process of cleansing using smoldering braids of sweetgrass (Stevenson, 1999). Arrangements would need to be made ahead of time for this type of ceremony. The PCL will be successful if all feel comfortable in the surroundings of the school and classrooms. It will be important to have early meetings to create the comfortable environment.

Potential Barriers

The components of a PLC include trust among members, identification of problems, finding solutions to the problems, and commitment to the process. DuFour (2004) indicated that the PLC must have a core focus, which should be the students'

success. Richardson (2011) identified other barriers being if members find the PLC too

time consuming, if members do not get along, if there is a lack of support from the

institution, and if the PLC has no positive results. There is also a chance that barriers may

occur due to the history of the population involved in this area of education. There is

historically a lack of trust between the Aboriginal community and any type of educational

institution (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999). The history of residential schools is still

recent in the minds of many of the adults and elderly in the community (Preston, 2008a).

There would have to be some honest conversations to work on building trust in order to

make the PLC a success. Building trust is key and would need to be done at the very

beginning and revisited periodically throughout the existence of the PLC (Bryk,

Camburn, & Louis, 1999). It will be important to for the group to agree on the

importance of education in the overall success of the students.

Roles and Responsibilities of PLC Members

One member of the PLC will be the facilitator that will be voted on by the group

at the end of the original training. This individual will work with the institution and

counselor to book the rooms and ensure the proper comfortable set up of the PLC. This

person will be the main contact person between the PLC and the institute administration.

Thornton and Cherrington (2014) indicated the need to have one individual to help guide

the discussion and help ensure the conversation are non-combative and the PLC keeps on

task. The other members of the group will share the task of identifying the barriers that

students may face as they progress through the year. The training will help to identify the

barriers so that all are aware of what they may be and then look at processes for each of

the members to work together monitor the student through the year. As a student

progresses through the year the pressures on them increase and sometimes they are

unable to see how the pressures are affecting them. This is the key component of this

project the early identification and the mitigation of the barrier. The training will help

create the trust that will be required to have the conversations needed as the barriers arise

throughout the year (Bryk, Camburn, & Louis, 1999). The rest of the year will involve

conversations when students feel the pressures or teachers, counselors, or community

members notice changes in the behavior of the student that perhaps indicates barriers are

popping up that could put the student at risk of dropping out. At this point an action plan

will be put in place to assist the student, remove the barrier and allow the student to

continue along the road to the completion of the program.

Proposal for Implementation Timetable

The first component of the PLC will be to develop it as the students are beginning

the school year. There will be a need meet with the communities where the students

reside to discuss the PLC and what it will mean to the students success. There will need

to be early meetings at the school with the teachers, community members, counselors,

and students to create a comfortable relationship. It will be important to mail, fax and

email posters to each of the reserves that are close to the school and from where the

students usually come. This will be done in August before the first meeting of the

students or orientation day as it is called. If there are others attending the program that

will be discovered during the registration process and the reserves they are from will be

contacted as early as possible. Personal contact will be made two weeks before the

orientation day so that arrangements can be made to show up for the first PLC meeting. A website and emails will be set up to ensure communication is organized and efficient. The counselors will organize information with teachers so that all are aware of the process that will be implemented. Training days and the original meetings will be scheduled by the counselor as well because they have the access to the school calendars and room bookings. The other meetings will be organized once the PLC is established and following the approximate timetable laid out in the project in Appendix A.

<div align="center">**Project Evaluation**</div>

The goal of this PLC is to ensure Aboriginal adult students have the support they need to identify and overcome barriers they may face as they attempt to re-enter the education system as adults. The project will be to put into place a PLC to include the counselors, teachers, students and the Aboriginal community, which will include the various reservations that the students originally come from. The original questions that will be posed to the PLC are: 1) what are the barriers that students can face as they attempt to return to school? 2) How can we identify the barriers that the student will face as they make the attempt to return to school in time to implement mediation? 3) What supports will be ready when mediation is required and how will it be implemented?

Type of Evaluation

The type of evaluation to be used in this project is a goals-based evaluation. The PLC's goal is to help adult Aboriginal students be successful in the completion of the UCEP course which is their entry point back into education as an adult. If the PLC is successful then more students will hopefully overcome the barriers they face and

complete the program. Van Osselear and Janiszewski (2012) describe goal-based

evaluations as measuring an incremental goal or goals over time. This is the best

justification for this type of evaluation and makes sense for this specific situation. The

time is the end of the program and the evaluation will be based on the goal to have the

student complete the program.

Outcomes and Performance Measures

The outcomes and performance measures of the project will involve an evaluation

of the evidence based on the PLC's goals. The goal is to have students be successful in

the completion of the UCEP program and this is a direct measurement instrument, which

will identify clearly the success of the PLC. Doerr (2009) indicated the need to use

evidence as the proof of the outcomes of the PLC.

Evaluation Goals for Key Stakeholders

There will be a need to evaluate the PLC in the community as well as in the

classroom. It will be imperative that the Aboriginal reservations keep in contact with the

students throughout the year to watch for barriers the students may face. They need to

bring these issues to the PLC group and provide mediation and support to avoid the

students dropping out of the program. The evaluation of the effectiveness of the PLC may

well bring a change in culture in the community and provide the assistance to all levels of

students in the educational system. The job of the PLC as a whole is to work together to

educate the students in the warning signs that may indicate they may be in trouble,

provide an avenue for the student to seek support and be ready with mediation plans to

assist the students. The Aboriginal community is a big part of the process, if a student gets to a point where they are facing barriers, they often return quickly to the community. It will be vital for the community to intervene immediately and provide the spiritual and cultural support that may not be available to the student in the institution and prevent the student from dropping the program.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

The findings from this study may contribute to positive social change by revealing the barriers that prevent Aboriginal adults returning to school from being successful. Providing changes to the entry requirements and more support in the programs will assist these students in their attempts to enter post-secondary education. Therefore, this study strives to promote positive social change by identifying barriers that are presently making the return to school so difficult for these Aboriginal adults. The use of PLCs will hopefully provide that support from all the areas of the student's life. If everyone is aware of the warning signs which identify the existence of a barrier, the mediation strategies to intervene and offer support the student will hopefully not get to that point of dropping out of the program. There is a good chance that with increased successes programs which help with mediation of the barriers will begin to be created and improved on. The hope is that as more of these students complete their education they will enter the workforce and contribute to the economic and social development of Alberta and Canada.

Far-Reaching

  The members of the PLC include the Aboriginal communities where the students have come from. If the process works to help students become successful in completing the program and moving on to post-secondary education there may be a desire to use the process in other levels of education. There are difficulties with high dropout rates at all levels of education in the Aboriginal communities (Hull, 2009). If the process does work for the Aboriginal adult population it will perhaps also be used by the reserves in the early education levels and by post-secondary institutions to also provide support at that level in the universities and colleges. Similar situations exist nationally across Canada and this study may help identify changes in processes throughout the nation (Preston, 2008a).

  The other major social change that may occur is in the area of attitude towards education and the trust that exists between the Aboriginal people and any educational institution. This would be a very big change and could assist in the overall importance of education to the Aboriginal population.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

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  In Section 3 the proposed project was identified as a Professional Learning Community and a review of the literature related to PLCs was provided. It included the justification for using a PLC and the organization of the specific one for this situation. This section also included the implementation plan and also the evaluation plan for the

PLC. Section 4 will include my personal reflections and conclusions about the project

study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

This section includes a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of the project. This will be followed by some suggestions for different possibilities for the project. Next, there is information concerning the scholarly nature of the project. There were many learnings from the project that will be identified. It is important to review the importance of the project and to provide suggestions for further research possibilities in this area.

Project Strengths

The purpose of the study was to identify barriers adult Aboriginal students face when attempting to return to school. The data revealed the barriers that were identified by the students in the interview process and clarified in the data analysis. The data also showed that the successful students had found a way to overcome the barriers. This would indicate that if there were ways to identify the barriers and intervene to assist the students to overcome the barriers they would hopefully not drop out of the program. I proposed a PLC made up of the students, teachers, counselors, and the Aboriginal community as a solution to the problem. The first strength of the project is this collective approach to identification of the barriers and putting action plans in place to mitigate them.

The second strength is the connection to the Aboriginal community. This will allow for the spiritual and cultural components of the mitigation that are difficult to apply at the institutional level. Aboriginal culture has a strong tie to community connectedness,

so for any program to be successful, the broader community context needs to be fully considered.

<div align="center">**Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations**</div>

One of the limitations of the study is the potential for the historic relationships between the Aboriginal community and the institution to taint the PLC from the beginning and cause a major fail in the project plan. The relations between the Aboriginal people and the government has improved over the last 10 years however some elders are very set in their ways and quite unforgiving (Preston, 2008a). With numerous reserves involved in the PLC there is the potential that one of them will have these feelings. I would suggest that if this does occur identify it early and have one of the other reserves have a conversation with the community that is not comfortable with the PLC and see if there are other members that want to be involved.

Another limitation is the personal nature of some of the barriers and the fact that a student may not want to admit they are actually facing these barriers. It is very important from the beginning to have an understanding of the nature of the conversation and that no opinions will be made related to the troubles the student faces. Often when someone faces substance abuse they may not step forward and identify it to the PLC group. One of the other members of the group will likely identify the possibility of this barrier. With the Aboriginal population attendance at substance abuse clinics may not work well. The only effective intervention often comes from the Aboriginal community itself. There are spiritual healings that the Aboriginal people honor very highly and these would be the best mitigation processes for the substance abuse problem.

Another possible limitation of the project is the possibility of members of the PLC not getting along and the strained relationship causing the PLC to be ineffective. I believe this is always a possibility no matter what PLC makeup on may have. Again the training sessions need to have specific protocols in place to keep conversations productive no matter how difficult at a high level with the student's success top of mind.

There have been attempts in the past to provide counseling to students to ensure barriers were dealt with before the student started on the journey back to school. However that was only one step; there were so many barriers that do not show themselves until later in the process. Even with an Aboriginal counselor, which is usually on staff, there is still not enough support to help the student overcome all the barriers they may face.

Alternatives to the PLC do not have all the components that are required to provide the support to these students. When the institution and the community are separate and intervene with the student separately from one another there is not a coordinated support. The student is often given conflicting information, which leads to frustration, which then leads to the student dropping out. It is so important to have the community and the institution working together to provide all of the components to ensure the success of the student.

Scholarship

Boyer (1990) proposed the four components of scholarship to be firstly original research advancing knowledge, secondly integration of the knowledge, then thirdly integration of the knowledge beyond an individual's normal duties and lastly teaching in

such a way that involves the public and is open to evaluation. All of these components were present in this project study. First, there was the establishment of a problem and a research study was developed and implemented around the problem. The data was collected and analyzed and the results were used to integrate into a project that would likely help to solve the problem. The project will involve integrating the knowledge to the teachers, counselors, student, and community to take part in a PLC that is certainly beyond the normal duties of any one of these individuals. The components speak to a scholarly process.

Project Development and Evaluation

At the beginning of the project I was limited in my knowledge of the scholarly process. After the completion of this project study I feel that I am now well versed in the detail and precision involved in being a scholar. I am well aware of the time involved in each step along the way from defining the problem to working on collecting and analyzing data to help discover the barriers that the adult Aboriginal students face, and finally developing a project to hopefully fix the problem or at least help minimize it.

A lot of what I learned related to the workings of a PLC and how it would be the best remedy for the problem I had identified. The knowledge related to the PLC and the eventual project took time and consideration. There had to be a way to include the community as it was a factor that was missing in past attempts to assist students. The PLC allowed for involvement both within the institution and outside in the Aboriginal community. The issue of evaluation was the easiest portion as it is based on student success under the influence of the PLC.

Leadership and Change

The project will provide both leadership and change. There is a need to ensure this growing Aboriginal population gets an education. In the past there has been a weakness in this area which has created a large number of adult Aboriginal people with a level of education below a high school diploma. When these adults attempt to return to school they face barriers that non Aboriginal adults returning to school do not. Aboriginal students tend to find the barriers too much to cope with and drop out of school (Preston, 2008a). The project will assist students in identifying the barriers early before they become overwhelming and also provide supports to overcome the barrier and prevent the student from dropping out. If the PLC works the way it was meant to work then the students will have a better chance to be successful and obtain the education needed to be successful in society.

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Before I began the study I had been aware that students faced issues as they went through the school year. I had watched many students who were academically capable drop out because of unexpected barriers that they just simply could not overcome. As I worked through the interviews with the students I began to see that the barriers were not ones that could not be mediated without the proper people involved. I began to understand the need for family, culture, and spirituality. The Aboriginal population was very complex and the members are very spiritual people; they often return to cultural beliefs when experiencing difficulty in life (Preston, 2008a). Not having this available to them as they go through difficulties at school can leave them without a very important

support system. Learning about the culture and what the makeup of my project was to help them was the most important learning I experienced.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

As part of the study I developed a deliverable project based on the research and results of the study. The project was a PLC involving teachers, counselors, students and the community to work together to identify barriers and provide supports to adult Aboriginal students as they attempt to return to school. I plan to assist the institution providing a University College Entrance Program in developing this program in the fall of this year as students begin the school year. The hope is more of the students will complete the program without dropping out. These students will go on to post-secondary education and be able to achieve whatever they want to.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Working through the research and analysis, I came to the realization that the project must be developed in a way to involve all the support team the students would need to depend on. The PLC was made up of the student, teachers, counselors and community members who would provide a solid support team to identify barriers and mitigate the effects of them. It will be vital to do the training and get the PLC on the right path at the beginning of the school year in order to ensure its success. The development of the PLC is only the first step in providing a framework of assistance for this student population.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

At the beginning of the study I had an awareness that as adult Aboriginal students attempt to re-enter school to move towards a post-secondary education they often face barriers that cause them to drop out of the program. Some of the barriers had been identified in past literature but there was really not a discussion on how to mitigate the barriers to support the students and prevent them from dropping out. The study confirmed that some of the same barriers exist but also identified many new ones that were not previously in the literature. It also clarified the root causes of the barriers and helped identify some of the supports which students say would have helped them overcome the barriers. The project was designed as a PLC with the student, the teachers, the counselors and the Aboriginal community as members. The PLC will begin with training to the members to identify the barriers that may occur, how to provide immediate support, what processes will be used to put a mitigation plan in place, and most importantly prevent the student from dropping out.

Local Community

The development of the PLC at the local institution will assist the adult Aboriginal students in their efforts to return to school by allowing them to remain in the program by removing the nonacademic stresses they may face. Teachers are able to assist a student when they are having difficulty with material in the class by providing tutorials and extra assignments to assist them. What they cannot do is help them much with the outside world, if the student is not in class they will be missing out on that academic side of the education process. With the formation of the PLC the school will now be working

outside the classroom to monitor and assist the students as they progress through the year. This is so important for this population; the study showed clearly that if there were some assistance and better supports many of them might have overcome the barriers that caused them to drop the program.

Far-Reaching

There are a number of things happening with regards to support for Aboriginal students throughout Canada at the present time. If a student drops a program presently there is a four year period that must pass before they attempt to re-enter a program again. There is also not a lot of financial aid available to students until they arrive at a post-secondary institution, in other words they are not supported in any way as they attempt to upgrade their education to arrive at a point where they are accepted to a post-secondary institution. With the recent changes in both federal and provincial government there has been a renewed interest in the education of Aboriginal adults which will create more UCEP programs as they promote more increases in post-secondary education of this population. With the PLC, the students are more likely to stay in the UCEP program and obtain the courses and marks they require to get the funding and move onto post-secondary education. The students from the study that were unsuccessful clearly stated that they might have remained if they were supported in overcoming the barriers they faced. The successful students identified that they had taken more than one attempt at returning before they were successful. It then makes sense to say the more students that remain in the program the more students that will go on to post-secondary education. It is hoped that with the success of the PLC in the UCEP program at the institution piloting

the process there will be a sharing with other institutions that operate the UCEP program. There is a hope that other institutions both at the upgrading level and the post-secondary level adopt the PLC program and more students will get the support they require to be successful.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

An effective PLC evolves over time. The PLC will get better at identifying barriers and there will be learnings that were not reported in this paper. This may add to the knowledge related to the barriers and a deeper understanding of their causes. The same can be said about the learning involving the supports that can be provided to help overcome the barriers. If there are more PLCs developed as a result of this original initiative then it would be important to share information and track the learnings. It makes sense that the more that members of the PLC are educated with regards to the barriers and supports as the year begins the quicker the responses and assistance will be. I believe that future research should involve follow-ups to the findings of each PLC to add to the knowledge and build a better inventory of barriers and support strategies. The other eventual outcome may be in prevention; if there is more known about the barriers there could potentially be a more precautionary approach to avoid the barriers altogether. There is work done before the intake of students into programs, which involves ensuring most barriers that are in the literature are mitigated ahead of time. As more understanding of barriers is gained perhaps more can be done for the student before they even enter the program.

Conclusion

In order to implement change it will be important to use the findings from the research into the specific barriers Aboriginal adult students face and to ensure that entry requirements take into consideration these potential barriers. There will need to be a variety of stakeholders involved with the implementation of this change. First the universities will need to review their entry requirements and ensure that they do not include the barriers that interfere with the success of these students. The government and other funding agencies need to review the educational funding available to these students. There will be a need to work with the Aboriginal communities to help provide and promote higher education both on the reserve through online learning or better educational institutions may need to be built on the reserve. Preston (2008) describes the need for Aboriginal elders to be on staff to assist students in addressing issues they may face on a day to day basis helping them remain in school.

There will need to be a change in the typical stereotyping of Aboriginal students by teachers. The way I propose to achieve this would be through the education of staff using training sessions to provide a view of our educational processes to the teachers through the eyes of the Aboriginal adult. If they are made aware of the barriers perhaps the teachers can work to structure their classes and programs in such a way to remove the barriers.

The steps required to implement the recommendations would first involve the identification of the specific barriers and ways of overcoming them. This would be followed by structuring an in-service training program for the teaching staff, counselors,

students, the Aboriginal community as well as other university staff in departments such as recruiting and administration. The next step would be to implement the training and ensure it is completed. The training initiative would be promoted to the government with the related research. This would ensure the training takes place at other institutions in Canada and perhaps other countries to help remove the barriers faced by these Aboriginal adults as they attempt to return to school.

Results from this research study may contribute to positive social change by revealing the barriers that prevent Aboriginal adults returning to school from being successful. Providing changes to the entry requirements and more support in the programs will assist these students in their attempts to enter post-secondary education. Therefore, this study strives to promote positive social change by identifying barriers that are presently making the return to school so difficult for these Aboriginal adults. The hope is that as more of these students complete their education they will enter the workforce and contribute to the economic and social development of Canada.

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Appendix A: The Project

The project is the establishment of a Professional Learning Community (PLC) which will be focused on assisting adult Aboriginal students overcome barriers they will face as they attempt to return to school. The membership of the PLC is made up of the adult Aboriginal students, the teachers of the program, the counselors and the Aboriginal communities where the students originate.

Purpose

The purpose of the PLC is to monitor the student throughout the year to help identify when a barrier arises that may threaten the students' ability to remain in the program. The PLC will then meet quickly and put supports in place with the student to assist them in overcoming the barrier and continuing on with their education. The collective approach to problem solving allows for variation in areas providing assistance, some assistance may come from programs already in place, others of the cultural or spiritual nature may need to receive some assistance from the Aboriginal community.

Goals

The goals of the PLC include:

- Work collaboratively for the good of the student.
- Work towards the one goal of keeping the student in the program to allow them to be successful.
- Members of the PLC will be vigilant in keeping up with the student as barriers can arise quickly and need to be addressed quickly.

- Members of the PLC will attend the training session and understand some of the trigger dates to be sure to check in with the students.

- PLC members will agree to attend meetings either in person or remotely when they are scheduled.

- PLC members will share learnings to make the process more efficient as the year progresses.

- The PLC members will value the involvement in their continual involvement in the process until completion date.

Successful Outcome

The successful outcome of the PLC will be the completion of the year with members still in place and still involved in all steps of the process. The success will truly lie in the number of adult Aboriginal students that have completed the program and have been helped along the way to overcome barriers that may have caused them to drop out before completion. There may be some students that do not pass every course, the PLC is not really aimed at successful academic performance, it is really based on giving the students that chance to stay in the program and attend classes to help them be successful.

Timeline

The project will be described as a timeline for the year which is an 8 month semester beginning in September of each year and finishing early in April. The PLC will be based on important dates before and during this time period.

PLC Training

PLC training will be scheduled in the middle of August and will consist of the teachers, counselors, and Aboriginal communities where most of the students reside. This is predetermined before this date and attendance of the actual student is not really known until orientation date to see if they register in the program. The training will consist of three full days with both formal and informal components. Each day will begin with a smudging ceremony and will include a celebratory meal. The activities of Day 1 will involve learning what a PLC is and what in involved with making it successful this will be led by me and the counselor as it will be important to have them lead it in future years. This session will give examples of how PLCs have worked in other institutions and why this one is so important.

There will then be a discussion led by me regarding the study findings around the barriers that the adult Aboriginal students reported facing during the year they attempted to return to school. A discussion will move from there led by me and counselor regarding the supports that are available to the students and how they are put into place. There will be a discussion of the importance of culture, community and spirituality as part of the process to assist the students and ways we can incorporate this at the school or in the times the students return to the Aboriginal communities throughout the year.

The next discussion will again be led by me and the counselor to identify dates and milestones throughout a typical year where there are often barriers popping up for students. This would be based on past drop out data which the counselors are well aware of and can easily present.

There will be discussions around meeting dates and protocols, in person versus remotely. Plans will need to be made around location spaces, meeting rooms and communication-related concerns. This is important as Leane (2014) states that the key to the success of PLCs is to have regular meetings. This will conclude by selecting a coordinator of the PLC. The day will end with a celebratory meal to initiate the beginning of the PLC and prayers for a successful year.

The second day will again begin with the smudging ceremony and will then lead to a discussion led by me and the counselor around the processes for identification of barriers and the communication within the group to discuss with the PLC as a whole including the students and quickly put support in place to keep them in the program. The discussion of barriers is very important as it allows discussion of perhaps some processes we can put in place to assist the student in identifying the warning signs both for themselves and for the rest of the PLC without feeling embarrassed or ashamed. The use of the word barrier will take away from the explanation of the details surrounding the barrier and will make it easier for students to share the realization that something is wrong without these other worries. There may be a real shift in attitudes of the PLC members in this area as much of the time opinions of the behavior are unforgiving and that does not help the process of assisting the student.

The second day will be the most difficult of the days. It is here that the strength of the PLC will evolve. The day will end with again a celebratory meal and prayers and will involve self-reflection about each of our roles in the PLC. The Aboriginal community will have some amount of work to do by contacting the individual students on the

reserves and showing support to them in their return to school. This is not necessarily financial support as that may not be possible, but it would be along the lines of supporting the student in the eyes of the rest of the community and show the importance to the rest of the community in joining the PLC member in assisting with the support. This may be a real change in attitude towards education that may not be a smooth ride in any way but is very important in assisting with student success as shown in the study.

The next meeting will be 1 day before the orientation day at the school. Orientation day is where the students come to register, pick up textbooks, look at schedules for classes. The PLC will meet 1day before orientation to ensure all are on the same page before inviting the students in as the final member of the PLC group.

Once the student had completed Orientation the second part of that day would be the first day of the PLC including the student as the final member. This meeting would begin with a smudging ceremony and consist of an educational training session around the PLC and its role during the upcoming year led by the counselor and me. The student success would be at the forefront here and the support offered would be the initial discussion. The next component would be to review the findings of the study led by me to show the new students what past students had experienced and the hopes they had for changes in the identification and support around the barriers that Aboriginal adults face throughout the year. A reconnection of the student with their Aboriginal community would follow so they could identify the support that is already in place for them. The last discussion of the day would include the overall timeline of scheduled check-ins for the

year and processes around what to do if related to warning signs or identified barriers.

The day would end with a celebratory meal, prayer and self-reflection.

Important Check Points Plan for Year

Time of Year	Reason for Check Point	Barriers Usually Identified
Orientation Check-In	Has anything changed since registration, is all in place with daycare, backup to daycare, funding, housing, living arrangement, jobs, schools for children, study time, technology, transportation, etc.	At this time of year, counselors and intake personnel have worked on putting supports in place for the student ahead of time, however things may change in any of the areas and this needs to be identified and supported as they begin the program. Barriers around the themes of Social Environment and Government funding.
One week check in Usually around Sept 10th	Barriers learned from PLC or warning signs may need to be discussed	This gives the students a chance to begin work with the PLC and perhaps they had thought they could handle a situation but learned in the PLC training that past students said it was not something they could manage long term and the student may want to identify it to the PLC before it becomes an issue. Some that could show up here are mental illness, medications, poor past knowledge and others. Barriers around the themes of Mental Health and Addictions, Building Self-Confidence and Personal Pride
One Month Check In Usually around September 30th	Barriers now start to show as pressures begin to be felt due to the difficulty of the	Barriers usually identified early are the drive to succeed, did not think it was

	material in the classes and the fatigue of study and family concerns mount	going to be this difficult, and pressure from feeling the lack of time for family, sometimes back-ups for day care and study time begin to fail. Barriers around the themes of Building Self-Confidence and Personal Pride and Social Environment.
Holiday Weekend around Thanksgiving	Students returning to reserve and old friends	Barriers here usually are around peer pressure, why are you doing this to yourself, return to substance abuse, PLC must be aware that the community needs to show support to student and celebrate their success so far. Barriers around the themes of Mental Health and Addictions and Social Environment.
After midterms week usually end of October to beginning of November	At this point the student marks may not be as high as they had expected easy time to quit or feel unsuccessful	Barriers around substance abuse common, the student goes off medication or self-medicated with old habits, PLC needs to watch for changes in attendance or behavior, severe fatigue, withdrawal etc. Barriers around the themes of Mental Health and Addictions and Social Environment.
Christmas Break	Students returning to reserve and old friends	Barriers here usually are around peer pressure, why are you doing this to yourself, return to substance abuse, PLC must be aware that the community needs to show support to student and celebrate their success so far. Barriers around the

		themes of Mental Health and Addictions and Social Environment.
Return to School after Christmas break	It is quite common to lose many students at this point in the program; PLC will rely on the Aboriginal community to work with students to return to school.	Barriers here usually are around peer pressure, why are you doing this to yourself, return to substance abuse, PLC must be aware that the community needs to show support to student and celebrate their success so far. Barriers around the themes of Mental Health and Addictions and Social Environment.
End of First Week January Usually January 10th or so	Has anything changed since before Christmas, is all in place with daycare, backup to daycare, funding, housing, living arrangement, jobs, schools for children, study time, technology, transportation, etc.	At this time things may change in any of the areas and these need to be identified and supported as they begin the program. Christmas time is often a difficult time for those with mental illness, lots of pressures etc. Barriers around the themes of Building Self-Confidence and Personal Pride and Social Environment.
Midsession check-in, usually mid-February	Here there are barriers around self-sabotage.	The barrier here is around self-sabotage related to the theme Social Environment, bad influences, peer pressure etc. Barriers around the themes of Building Self-Confidence and Personal Pride and Social Environment and Value of Education.
Near year end, usually near the middle of March.	Lots of discussion of Spirituality at this time of year the school usually will try to schedule around dance of some celebration.	Barriers around the themes of Building Self-Confidence and Personal Pride and Social Environment, Value of Education and

		Spirituality.
Check in Before Final Exams	Lots of discussion of Spirituality, need the support of Aboriginal community for support	Barriers around the themes of Building Self-Confidence and Personal Pride and Social Environment, Value of Education and Spirituality.
Graduation Day	So important that all Members of the PLC are present, this is the final celebration of the year	Barriers have been overcome, time for self-reflection.

Professional Learning Community Training

Day 1 Agenda

- 8:00 am - 8:30 am   Opening prayer and Smudging
- 8:30 am - 9:00 am   Introductions
- 9:00 am - 9:30 am   Review objectives
- 9:30 am - 11:00 am   Review Study Findings and Discuss Barriers
- 11:00 am - Noon   Discuss Present Onboarding Process and Barriers Addressed
- Noon - 1:00 pm   Lunch
- 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm   Discuss and list mitigation processes both at the school and community level to assist in overcoming these barriers.
- 4:00 pm - 4:30 pm   End of day Prayer and Smudging

Professional Learning Community Training

Objectives Day 1

✦Faculty and Aboriginal Community members will understand the barriers adult Aboriginal students face when returning to school
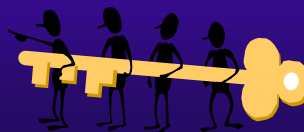
Faculty and Aboriginal Community members will understand the barriers adult Aboriginal students face when returning to school.

Findings From the Study

Theme 1

Building self-confidence and personal pride	**Need to have the pride in themselves to improve their confidence.** **Need to build their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.** **Need to Establish a cycle of success.** **Need to establish that they can be successful and that school completion was possible**

Theme 2

Social Environment	**External – related to society as a whole.** **friends, family, coworkers, bad influences, crime, bad early education, bad upbringing, peer pressure,** **Internal – specific to the person, includes self-sabotage, suicide, substance use and abuse,**

Theme 3

Racism

Residential Schools, cause of anger issues. No father figure, Family issues, no trust in Government
Somehow can relate the negative impact of residential schools to many of the problems listed. It had a negative impact on family structures and cultural identity, fathers left, trust was lost, people are angry
Specific racism, being called names, unwanted in schools

Theme 4

Spirituality

Need for spirituality,
Need for familiar surroundings, a safe place
Importance of rituals
Connection to faith
Connection to ancestors
A place to pray,
Need for ceremonies such as round dances and pow wows

Theme 5

Government Governance Issues

Funding issues,
Bill C31 a bill identifying what year an Aboriginal person must be born in order to receive various funding for education

Federal government intrusion, lack of trust, imposed restrictions (level of government that deals with Aboriginal people)
Provincial government – lack of programs, supports and view it is a federal issue (Provincial Governments historically do not fund or govern Aboriginal people
Band government – corruption, misuse of funds, lack of self-management (link back to federal role and restrictions, federal government supplies them with money but does not monitor how it is spent)

Theme 6

Mental Health and Addictions

(Substance abuse, Mental Health)

Ease of falling into old habits. Higher when returning to the reserve environment or with friends.
Worse if there was family abuse which there was a lot of on the reserves. Substance use begins earlier (e.g., around age 14). Prone to drinking and poor quality street drugs, sometime gasoline or Lysol spray, Glues

Theme 7

Value of Education (Comment: Outlier said by one student) (Student completed program)	Student said they required a personal realization of the value of educational attainment for attaining life goals. This finally helped them to be successful.

Theme 8

Activist for the People (Comment: Outlier said by one student) (Student did not complete the program)	Feeling there is a need to advance the needs of not just themselves, but their community. A sense of activism in efforts to improve the system and opportunities for other members of their community. Desire to act as a role model.

Present Onboarding Process and Barriers Addressed

✦ Student Interviews and Placement
✦ Introductory Math and English Assessment
✦ Financial
✦ Child Care
✦ Living Arrangements
✦ Transportation
✦ Addictions
✦ Health

Discuss and List mitigation processes both at the school and community level to assist in overcoming these barriers.

Day 1 Review

Barriers and Mitigation

**Professional Learning Community Training
Day 2**

Faculty and Aboriginal Community members will understand the importance of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) and learn the rules, processes and protocols around the PLC.

Day 2 Agenda

- ✦ 8:00 am - 8:30 am   Opening prayer and Smudging
- ✦ 8:30 am - 9:00 am   Day 1 Review
- ✦ 9:00 am - 9:30 am   Day 2 Objectives
- ✦ 9:30 am - 11:00 am   Introduction to Professional Learning Community
- ✦ 11:00 am - Noon   Development of Professional Learning Community, roles and responsibilities
- ✦ Noon - 1:00 pm   Lunch
- ✦ 1:00 pm - 3:30 pm   Review List mitigation processes and determine role at the school and community level related to the processes
- ✦ 3:30 pm - 4:00 pm   Review Agenda day 3 and discuss student role in the PLC
- ✦ 4:00 pm - 4:30 pm   End of day Prayer and Smudging
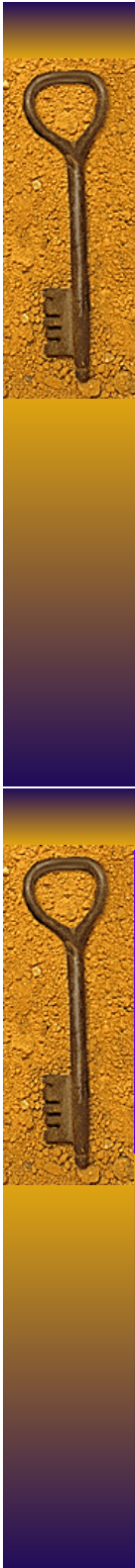
Professional Learning Community PLC

✦ History of PLC (Literature from Study)
✦ Component of PLC
  – Shared Leadership
  – Common Vision
  – Common Values
  – Collaboration Amongst Peers
  – Community Learning
  – Creativity
  – Measuring Success

Creation of the Professional Learning Community
To Remove the Barriers for Adult Aboriginal Students Returning to School
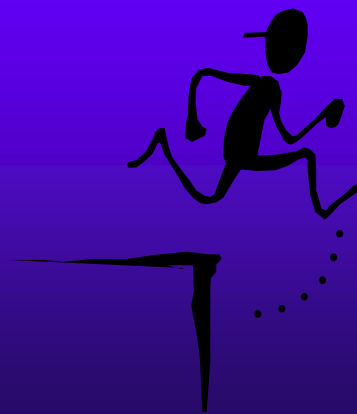
Making Students Successful
What Part Do I Play

✦ Role of Teachers in the PLC

✦ Role of Counselors in the PLC

✦ Role of Aboriginal Community in the PLC

✦ Role of Student in the PLC

✦ Review the Mitigation Processes from Day 1 and determine each members role in each mitigation process for each barrier.

Agenda Day 3 Preview

First Day for Student involvement

✦8:00 am - 8:30 am   Opening prayer and Smudging

✦8:30 am - 9:00 am Introductions and Welcome to the Students

✦9:00 am - 9:30 am Review objectives for this training

✦9:30 am – 11:30 am   Review Study Findings and Discuss Barriers Students May Face

✦11:30am – Noon   Introduction to Professional Learning Community PLC

✦Noon - 1:00 pm   Lunch

✦1:00 pm – 3:00 pm   Discuss and list mitigation processes both at the school and community level and the plans for assisting students in overcoming these barriers.

✦3:00 pm – 4:00 pm   Role of the Student in the PLC, Listing of PLC check in and meeting dates

✦4:00 pm - 4:30 pmEnd of day Celebration, Prayer and Smudging

What Can I Do to Prepare for Day 3

Discuss Preparations by members of the PLC to be ready for the student involvement in the day 3 training

Professional Learning Community Training
Student Day
Agenda

- 8:00 am - 8:30 am   Opening prayer and Smudging
- 8:30 am - 9:00 am   Introductions and Welcome to the Students
- 9:00 am - 9:30 am   Review objectives for this training
- 9:30 am – 11:30 am   Review Study Findings and Discuss Barriers Students May Face
- 11:30am – Noon   Introduction to Professional Learning Community PLC
- Noon - 1:00 pm   Lunch
- 1:00 pm – 3:00 pm   Discuss and list mitigation processes both at the school and community level and the plans for assisting students in overcoming these barriers.
- 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm   Role of the Student in the PLC, Listing of PLC check in and meeting dates
- 4:00 pm - 4:30 pm   End of day Celebration, Prayer and Smudging

Professional Learning Community Training
Student Day
Objectives

Faculty, Students and Aboriginal Community members will understand the barriers adult Aboriginal students face when returning to school.

Faculty, Students and Aboriginal Community members will understand the importance of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) and learn the rules, processes and protocols around the PLC.

Barriers Determined in the Study

There were Themes from the study that were identified as potential barriers adult Aboriginal students face when attempting to return to school

Identification of the barriers as you run into them is the first step

These are the barriers you may face

Theme 1

Building self-confidence and personal pride

Need to have the pride in themselves to improve their confidence.
Need to build their self-esteem and sense of accomplishment.
Need to Establish a cycle of success.
Need to establish that they can be successful and that school completion was possible

Theme 2

Social Environment

External – related to society as a whole.
friends, family, coworkers, bad influences, crime, bad early education, bad upbringing, peer pressure,
Internal – specific to the person, includes self-sabotage, suicide, substance use and abuse,

Theme 3

Racism

Residential Schools, cause of anger issues. No father figure, Family issues, no trust in Government
 Somehow can relate the negative impact of residential schools to many of the problems listed. It had a negative impact on family structures and cultural identity, fathers left, trust was lost, people are angry
Specific racism, being called names, unwanted in schools

Theme 4

Spirituality

Need for spirituality,
Need for familiar surroundings, a safe place
            Importance of rituals
            Connection to faith
            Connection to ancestors
A place to pray,
Need for ceremonies such as round dances and pow wows

Theme 5

Government Governance Issues

Funding issues,
Bill C31 a bill identifying what year an Aboriginal person must be born in order to receive various funding for education

Federal government intrusion, lack of trust, imposed restrictions (level of government that deals with Aboriginal people)
Provincial government – lack of programs, supports and view it is a federal issue (Provincial Governments historically do not fund or govern Aboriginal people
Band government – corruption, misuse of funds, lack of self-management (link back to federal role and restrictions, federal government supplies them with money but does not monitor how it is spent)

Theme 6

Mental Health and Addictions

(Substance abuse, Mental Health)

Ease of falling into old habits. Higher when returning to the reserve environment or with friends.
Worse if there was family abuse which there was a lot of on the reserves. Substance use begins earlier (e.g., around age 14). Prone to drinking and poor quality street drugs, sometime gasoline or Lysol spray, Glues

Theme 7

Value of Education (Comment: Outlier said by one student) (Student completed program)	Student said they required a personal realization of the value of educational attainment for attaining life goals. This finally helped them to be successful.

Theme 8

Activist for the People (Comment: Outlier said by one student) (Student did not complete the program)	Feeling there is a need to advance the needs of not just themselves, but their community. A sense of activism in efforts to improve the system and opportunities for other members of their community. Desire to act as a role model.

Present Onboarding Process and Barriers Addressed

✦ Financial
✦ Child Care
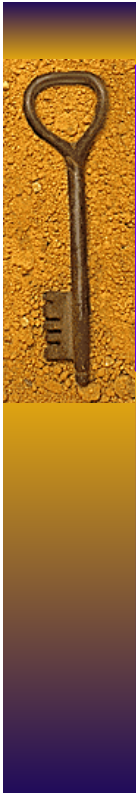✦ Living Arrangements
✦ Transportation
✦ Addictions
✦ Health

Introduction to the Professional Learning Community

✦ History of PLC (Literature from Study)
✦ Component of PLC
  – Shared Leadership
  – Common Vision
  – Common Values
  – Collaboration Amongst Peers
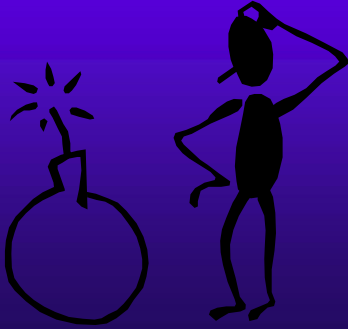 – Community Learning
  – Creativity
  – Measuring Success

PLC What is the Student Role

✦ Discuss the role of the student in identifying times when they arrive at or face a barrier, what is the process they will use within the PLC to gain the assistance they require to overcome the barrier, stay in the program and successful complete the program.

Making Students Successful What role does each member of the PLC
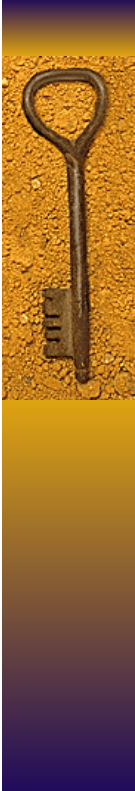
✦ Role of Teachers in the PLC
✦ Role of Counselors in the PLC
✦ Role of Aboriginal Community in the PLC
✦ Role of Student in the PLC

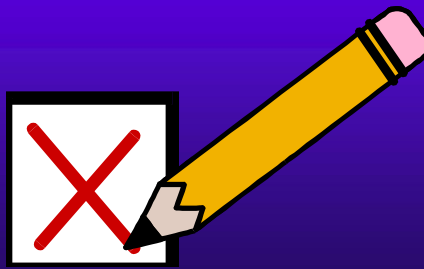# Review of the Roles Each Member has agreed to play in the Mitigation Process for each Barrier

✦ Review the Mitigation Processes from Day 2 and Review what was promised by each members as their role in each mitigation process for each barrier.

Check In Dates and Meetings for the Year

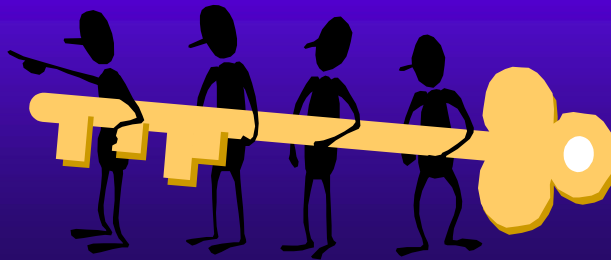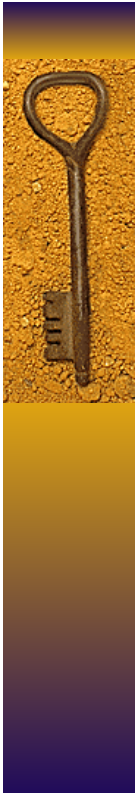✦ Review of Check in Dates and Meeting plans for the upcoming year.

Celebration

✦ Join Us and Celebrate our PLC

Appendix B: Consent Form – Participant

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study about the barriers faced by adult Aboriginal students when attempting to return to school. The researcher is inviting Aboriginal adults who have attended a university and college entrance program to be in the study, whether you completed the program or not. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this project study before deciding whether or not to take part.

A researcher named Robert Campbell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this project study. You may already know the researcher as a former professor at ███████████████████████████, but this project study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this project study is to identify barriers and challenges experienced by adult Aboriginal students as they return to school.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this project study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in an audio recorded interview for approximately 30 to 45 minutes.
- The interview will consist of questions asking about your age, marital status, and employment status.
- The interview will also consist of questions designed to understand any problems you may have experienced as you returned to school.

Here are some sample questions:
Tell me about your family. Do they support your efforts?
Tell me about your personal experience with school. What did you like? What did you find difficult? Do/did the teachers support you? How?

Voluntary Nature of the Project Study:
This project study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the project study. If you decide to join the project study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. In the interview, you do not need to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable in any way.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Project Study:
Being in this type of project study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as feeling stressed or uncomfortable when recalling

difficult life experiences. Being in this project study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being.

The project study results will be used to help inform post-secondary institutions about the barriers experienced by adult Aboriginal students so that appropriate programs or supports can be implemented. Future Aboriginal students may experience more acceptance and more support because of your participation. Thank you very much for sharing your schooling experiences with others. Many may well benefit.

Payment:
Each participant in the project study will be given a gift card in the amount of $5. The gift certificate will be provided at the end of the interview.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential and your name will not be written down as part of the interview. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the project study reports. Your information will be recorded using the code number like M1 (M1-0001). Data will be kept secure by storing it in locked cabinets within a secure location at my home office. Any data stored on a computer will be password protected. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, and then it will be totally destroyed.

Should you identify involvement in a criminal activity on your part, for which you have not been convicted already the researcher will be obligated to inform law enforcement. Any information on past convictions will be kept confidential.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at ███████████████████████████████
███
███
███████████████████████████. Walden University's approval number for this project study is **03-11-15-0148039** and it expires on **3/10/2016.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the project study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand I am agreeing to the terms described abo

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

_____

Appendix C: Interview Guide – Participants

Instructions

Good [morning, afternoon, evening]. My name is Robert Campbell. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project study. I would like to have a conversation with you about your experiences with returning to school. I'll start by asking you a few questions about you and then questions about any barriers you may have experienced. You are free to decline any question or to stop at any time throughout this interview.

If it is okay with you, I will audio record our conversation. The purpose of recording the conversation is so that I can get all the details, but at the same time carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that your comments will remain confidential. By this I mean that no one will know that any response was yours. I will be compiling a report that will contain a summary of all participants' comments.

At no time will it be possible to identify anyone participating in the project study. If you wish not to answer any question, just tell me and we will skip that question.

First, I would like to ask you a few questions about you. These will be used to help organize the data analysis.

1. How old were you when you started the upgrading program: _____

2. Did you attend the program within the last five years?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

3. Did you complete the program?
   ☐ Yes ☐ No

4. Sex
   ☐ Male ☐ Female

5. What was your marital status at the time you were in the program:
   ☐   Single (never married)
   ☐   Married / Common Law
   ☐   Divorced / Separated
   ☐   Widowed

6. What was your employment status at the time you enrolled in the program?
   ☐   Employed (indicate part or full-time)
   ☐   Unemployed
   ☐   Student
   ☐   Other: _____

7. What accomplishments are you most proud of in your life? What made you proud? Why were you proud?

8. What are your life goals?
9. What are possible obstacles to accomplishing your life goals?

10. How supportive is your family of your education?

11. Tell me about your personal experience with the school. [Probing questions: What did you enjoy? What did you find difficult? Did you feel supported by the teaching staff? How did you interact with other students?]

12. What barriers popped up as you were going through the process of re-entering the education system (School)? [Probe on school related barriers and personal life barriers or financial barriers, or spiritual barriers, or etc. possible other types of barriers.

13. For those who completed the program;

    13.1 What motivated your decision to come back to school?

    13.2 What does completing the program mean to you?

    13.3 Why was this important to you?

14. For those who dropped out before completing;

    14.1 What were the factors that influenced your decision to drop out?

    14.2 Was there anything the school could have offered you or done for you that would have allowed you to continue?

    14.3 What additional supports might have helped you more? (or helped at all)

15. As I mentioned, I will be preparing a short summary report of the findings. Would you like me to provide you with a copy?
    ☐Yes ☐No

Appendix D: Consent Form – Counselor

CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study about the barriers faced by adult Aboriginal students when attempting to return to school. As part of this study, the researcher would like to interview a counselor from a university college entrance program to get their perceptions on barriers to success students faced when in this program.

This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this project study before deciding whether or not to take part. A researcher named Robert Campbell, who is a doctoral student at Walden University, is conducting this project study. You may already know the researcher as a former professor at ██████ ████████████████████, but this project study is separate from that role.

Background Information:
The purpose of this project study is to identify barriers and challenges experienced by adult Aboriginal students as they return to school.

Procedures:
If you agree to be in this project study, you will be asked to:
- Participate in an audio recorded interview for approximately 30 to 45 minutes.
- The interview will consist of questions asking you to describe your perceptions of barriers faced by adult Aboriginal students attending a university and college entrance program.

Voluntary Nature of the Project Study:
This project study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the project study. If you decide to join the project study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time. In the interview, you do not need to answer any question that makes you uncomfortable in any way.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Project Study:
Being in this type of project study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as feeling stressed or uncomfortable when recalling difficult experiences. Being in this project study would not pose risk to your safety or well-being.

The project study results will be used to help inform post-secondary institutions, government agencies, and Bands about the barriers experienced by adult Aboriginal students so that appropriate programs or supports can be implemented. Future Aboriginal

students may experience more acceptance and more support because of your participation.

Payment:
You will be given a gift card in the amount of $5. The gift certificate will be provided at the end of the interview.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential and your name will not be written down as part of the interview. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the project study reports. Your information will be recorded using the code number like M1 (M1-0001). Data will be kept secure by storing it in locked cabinets within a secure location at my home office. Any data stored on a computer will be password protected. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university, and then it will be totally destroyed.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at ███████████████████████████████ ██ ███████████████████ Walden University's approval number for this project study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**
The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the project study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand I am agreeing to the terms described abo

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix E: Interview Guide – Counselor

Instructions

Good [morning, afternoon, evening]. My name is Robert Campbell. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this project study. I would like to have a conversation with you about your perceptions about any barriers you observed among the university and college entrance program students. I will not be asking you questions about specific students, but rather your views about barriers to success. To ensure the privacy of any past students, please do not use any student names or other identifying information in your responses. You are free to decline any question or to stop at any time throughout this interview.

If it is okay with you, I will audio record our conversation. The purpose of recording the conversation is so that I can get all the details, but at the same time carry on an attentive conversation with you. I assure you that your comments will remain confidential. By this I mean that no one will know that any response was yours. I will be compiling a report that will contain a summary of all participants' comments. At no time will it be possible to identify anyone participating in the project study. If you wish not to answer any question, just tell me and we will skip that question.

1. How long were you a counselor with the upgrading program?_____

2. From your experience as a counselor, what do you seen as the major barriers for a student to successfully complete their studies?

3. How do you feel these barriers differed between those students that were successful from those that did not finish the program?

4. Do you feel there was adequate support provided to the students? [Probing questions: Were there government programs? Support from Bands? Support from educational institutions? Support from family?]